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FOIA Request on Future Nuclear Deterrent

I wish to request a review of the response to a request for information on the briefing to industry on the Future Nuclear Deterrent in Abbey Wood on 29 June 2007.

The documents provided were substantially redacted. Without access to the material I am unable to establish if there is an overriding public interest, but I have reason to suspect that this is the case.

A press report in Defence Solutions said that the briefing was attended by a broad spectrum from industry including some very compact Small to Medium Enterprises. The keynote address made to the meeting by David Gould indicates that there were 200 representatives from industry in the audience. I suspect that many of those in the audience would not normally have access to sensitive information on nuclear submarines and nuclear weapon outwith their own limited area of expertise, and that those drafting the presentations were mindful of this.

I am not convinced that, at this gathering, information would have been disclosed the release of which could prejudice the capability and security of the Armed Forces. Nor do I accept that it is likely that information of US origin was disclosed which was so sensitive as to outweigh the public interest in disclosure.

The three investigations carried out by the House of Commons Defence Committee, the debate at Westminster and the two debates in the Scottish Parliament all show that there is substantial public and political interest in this issue. In the light of this, disclosure is particularly significant. For example I cannot understand why, given the Defence Committee's clear interest in clarifying the timescale, the timeline proposed by Rear Admiral Matthews cannot be published.

It is likely some of the redactions relate to proposed developments that would affect Scotland. The clear majority of MPs representing Scottish constituencies voted against the Government motion on 14 March. On 14 June the Scottish Parliament called on the UK Government not to go ahead with this project.

The Scottish Government's ability to assess the impact of Trident renewal on devolved matters is restricted because of the limited information available. For example the future availability of facilities in Scotland and any proposal to replace them is of environmental significance.

I suspect that it is not correct to say that the need to prevent restrictions on Ministers outweighs the public interest.

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