



Please respond to:

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To: Ben Wallace, Minister for Defence
Jeremy Quin, Minister for Defence Procurement

Dear Sirs

DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

As chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group, I am writing to voice our ongoing concern regarding the Ministry of Defence and its interaction with the both the Dounreay Stakeholder Group and NRTE Vulcan's host communities of Caithness and North Sutherland.

You will be aware from previous correspondence that this is not the first time we have written to the Department on the subject of community engagement and clarity over the decommissioning of the Vulcan site. It is therefore extremely disappointing that we have had to write a further letter on behalf of our membership.

The Dounreay Stakeholder Group was set up following the creation of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), with the focus moving away from the old local liaison groups. It therefore made complete sense to create a group that considered both the Dounreay and Vulcan sites as the two nuclear facilities are both historically connected as well as having mutual socio/economic importance to Caithness and North Sutherland. Although we have continued to receive high-level operational updates which are welcome, there has been a lack of clarity over the site since the decision in 2015 to decommission NRTE Vulcan and to cease active operations under the Submarine Delivery Service. This is in stark contrast to the open (and mostly transparent) processes we are accustomed to with the civil site at Dounreay, which although not an active consideration for ongoing national security like Vulcan, has held, processed and de-risked high hazard materials which are of national importance both to the UK but our global allies such as the United States. While we recognise that NDA/DSRL and MoD have different remits in regards to community engagement and are acutely aware of the unique security issues around Vulcan and the United Kingdom's Submarine programme, we believe that high-level timeframes and scope for the decommissioning programme should have been made available to the host community.

Caithness and North Sutherland has been very supportive of MOD and the activities undertaken at Vulcan throughout its role as a test establishment. We are incredibly proud that the operations of both SFT and DSMP at Vulcan helped keep our island nation safe, but also ensured the safety of those men and women who served as submariners. It is for that reason that we wish to ensure that when undertaking its market engagement for decommissioning, that the MoD can provide assurance to DSG on the social value/socio economic aspects of the work to be contracted out.

When the PIN for decommissioning was issued and a market day was conducted for interested parties, we were deeply disappointed by some of the presentations given to potential bidders for the work. Given the potential opportunity to decommission the site, the abundance of local talent, experience and an engaged local supply chain, there is a belief that the opportunity was undersold to the detriment of the programme.

Despite this, we had assumed that the decommissioning efforts would continue, so when the PIN was withdrawn we had sought an explanation on where this left Vulcan, the decommissioning timeline and whether it would continue to be aligned with the Dounreay civil site.

As a result of these enquiries, we were promised an update at the March public meeting of the DSG, which was pulled at the last minute from the agenda. We were informed then that as soon as the Scottish elections were over there would be an opportunity for update, removing the potential obstruction of Purdah. At our public meeting on 9th June, representatives from the MOD were still unable to provide any meaningful information.

Because of this lack of forthcoming information, a motion was carried outlining that if the Ministry of Defence was unable to provide an update by the time the next public meeting (September) then DSG would need to seriously consider whether they wish to continue as the stakeholder group of NRTE Vulcan. I wish to stress that this is the first time in the history of the DSG that a public vote or indeed a motion from a sitting Chairman has been presented to community stakeholders and reflects the desire to seek clarity on what remains an important employer for the Far North of Scotland.

At this stage, I would like to emphasise that we have every sympathy for the local team who I believe have been placed in an impossible position. Because information has failed to be cleared by those higher up the line of command, they are unable to answer the questions asked of the site and the Ministry of Defence in both our public and private meetings. It is regrettable that it appears that the Vulcan site does not understand community engagement, or indeed actively resists efforts to provide information about the future of the site. Having built up a relationship with local staff and in particular senior position holders, we know this not to be the case. I can only implore the Ministry of Defence to consider that this position is deeply unfair and to empower those who report to us and the community.

Since the June public meeting, Commodore Mark Prince has contacted me as chair of DSG following the Ministerial statement on the 17th and we discussed the potential for updates at our July sub group with an update presentation at the DSG public meeting in September.

As operational activities have been extended, we respect the need for ongoing protection of national secrets and defence of the realm and this will impact what can be forthcoming in respect to decommissioning. But given our concerns and frustrations over

the years that we have been operating as a stakeholder group we do still believe that sending this letter is the appropriate course of action. We believe that working together to provide real community engagement going forward will be beneficial to both the Ministry of Defence, the Vulcan staff, contractors, the community and local suppliers.

Our vote to remove MOD from the DSG was taken with sadness and we have an important role to play ensuring our community understands the decommissioning timelines while working with others to endeavour to create new economic activity as both the Dounreay and Vulcan site runs down.

We trust that MOD will reconsider their involvement in community engagement and look to NDA/DSRL as a model of how this can be done without having to provide security sensitive information.

We welcome the indication that information will be provided at the September meeting – if this is not forthcoming, due to no fault of the local team, then we will seriously consider our role in community engagement with MOD in the future.

I am more than happy to discuss the matter further and both myself and my Vice-Chair can be made available at your convenience. Indeed, I am more than happy to travel to London if this would be convenient.

We look forward to your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

Sent electronically without signature

Provost Struan Mackie

Chairman of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group

Copied to:

Commodore Mark Prince

Wendy Newton

Mark Cleminson

Jamie Stone, MP

Maree Todd, MSP

Andrew Van Der Lem, NDA