

## **“Unready Scotland” Update 28 August 2017**

Nukewatch gave the Scottish Government a draft copy of this report on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017, requesting a response within three weeks. The aim was to give the Scottish ministers the opportunity to engage with the issues before publication and potentially to affect the final version of the report. In the event, a new deadline of 13<sup>th</sup> August was set. Two days before that deadline Nukewatch received the following letter:

11 August 2017

Dear Mr Mackenzie,

Thank you for sight of your report “Unready Scotland – the critical gap to the transport of nuclear weapons”.

As you are aware, the Scottish Government firmly opposes the possession, threat and use of nuclear weapons. We are committed to the safe and complete withdrawal of Trident from Scotland, and have repeatedly called on the UK Government to cancel plans for its renewal.

One issue that forms part of the basis for our opposition to nuclear weapons is the risk they pose during transportation. It is, of course, the case that responsibility for the transportation of nuclear warheads lies with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The Scottish Government, however, expects any such transportation to be carried out safely and securely as is possible, and has made this expectation clear to the UK Government. The Scottish Government does not have the powers or access to detailed information on the issues around the safety and security of the MoD’s transportation arrangements and, as a result, it is not a practical proposition for the Scottish Government to undertake a public investigation into the risks of nuclear convoys.

Regarding the risk to the public, it is vital that the transport of nuclear weapons in Scotland is rigorously planned, carried out with close co-operation with Police Scotland, and supported by a large number of highly-trained specialists. The MoD advise that “the limited movement of nuclear defence material together with inherent safety and security features and procedures mean that the probability of an incident leading to a release of radiation is extremely low. It is secured in a custom-designed container that is tested to protect against a range of scenarios, and the vehicle that carries the container provides robust crash protection, even in the event of a severe road incident or emergency.” Given the Scottish Government does not have access to the detailed information on the MoD’s arrangements, we are not in a position to independently corroborate the MoD’s assurance.

We can, however, provide our assurance around the preparedness of our communities to respond to major incidents. As well as the detailed plans which the emergency services already have in place for such events, the Scottish Government participates in annual multi-agency exercises around the release of radioactive material from nuclear power sites, the response to which would be very similar to a release from a nuclear convoy. We also support a strong network of resilience partnerships which operate across the country, from local up to national level. These groups, which draw together first responders, local authorities, the voluntary sector and others, ensure that our communities are ready to respond to a wide range of emergencies, regardless of their cause. These resilience structures have been robustly tested and proven, both by regular exercising and real events.

We, therefore, believe we have the right plans in place to be ready should such an incident take place.

Finally, it would be greatly appreciated if references naming officials are removed from the report. Any response to enquiries regarding nuclear weapons, convoys, etc. comes from Scottish Government, rather than a specific unit or individual.

I hope this is of assistance to you.

**PAUL WHEELHOUSE**

Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy

The letter is a serious disappointment. Nukewatch has replied to the Minister as below:

28<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Dear Paul,

**“Unready Scotland”**

Thank you for your letter of 11<sup>th</sup> of August.

We are concerned that you have misunderstood our report and its intention to provide some openings for the Scottish Government. Our focus, arising from the survey of local councils, is firmly on the response of the Scottish civil authorities, not on whatever measures the Ministry of Defence may take to ensure the safety of the nuclear warhead traffic. This is made clear on Page 7 of the report and the emphasis continues throughout.

At the same time your uncritical acceptance of the MoD's assurances is surprising. You quote uncritically their statement about the likelihood of an accident, as if likelihood is the only factor in rigorous risk assessment. On page 14 of the report we point out:

*“Such assessments should combine two factors: the likelihood of an event and the potential impact of an event. In the case of nuclear weapons convoys, even if the likelihood of an event is remote, the potential severity of an event will elevate the risk element to High.”*

As to severity, we have, on the front page of the report, quoted the MoD's assessment of the potential impact of a serious convoy accident:

*“The consequences of such an incident are likely to be considerable loss of life and severe disruption both to the British people's way of life and to the UK's ability to function as a sovereign state”.*

In your letter you say that the Scottish Government participates in annual multi-agency exercises around the release of radioactive material from nuclear power sites, the response to which would be very similar to a release from a nuclear convoy. As we have carefully pointed out in our report the warhead convoys present a very specific threat. Nuclear power sites are not also stores of high explosive nor do they travel around the country. They are in fact regulated by Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPiR). Generic simulations that cover the broad range of radiological mishaps do not take account of the specific threats provided by the warhead traffic.

In your letter you write:

*“The Scottish Government does not have the powers or access to detailed information on the issues around the safety and security of the MoD's transportation arrangements and, as a result, it is not a practical proposition for the Scottish Government to undertake a public investigation into the risks of nuclear convoys.”*

Nowhere in the report do we ask for that.

The MOD do publish Local Authority and Emergency Services Information (LAESI) edition 11 of which was issued in July.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634162/20170627-LAESI-Ed\\_11.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634162/20170627-LAESI-Ed_11.pdf)

On the basis of what the MOD expect of civil authorities in LAESI here's what we did recommend:

*“One way forward is for the Scottish Government to urgently head up a review of the civil authority response (our underlining) to the threat of an incident or accident involving the nuclear weapons convoys.”*

Such a review is perfectly within the power of the Scottish Government and wholly in line with its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act. It is important that the Scottish Government faces up to just how patchy and poor is the readiness of local councils on the convoy routes. If this results in identifying any efforts to obfuscate the issue by the UK Government you could be sure of citizen support.

Nukewatch is a citizen monitoring group with a strong record over 32 years of shining a light on the MoD's weapon and weapon materials transport. We are an organisation whose input and expertise is sought by the Parliament's Cross Party Group on Nuclear Disarmament. It is inappropriate for a Government that is committed to nuclear disarmament to disregard or rebut our work.

Our preference remains to work with the Scottish Government. We are about to embark on an extensive programme of dissemination and it would be helpful to all parties who are committed to taking seriously the nuclear risk we collectively face if we could meet with you beforehand to explore constructive approaches.

Jane Tallents and David Mackenzie  
for Nukewatch

The publication of “Unready Scotland” was reported by the Sunday Herald, with a thorough article from Rob Edwards and an editorial strongly backing the Nukewatch position.

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15483954.No\\_safety\\_assessments\\_carried\\_out\\_for\\_nuclear\\_convoy\\_routes\\_in\\_Scotland/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15483954.No_safety_assessments_carried_out_for_nuclear_convoy_routes_in_Scotland/)

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/sunday\\_herald\\_view/15483956.Nuclear\\_safety\\_must\\_be\\_parity\\_amount/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/sunday_herald_view/15483956.Nuclear_safety_must_be_parity_amount/)

The Sunday Herald article includes a comment by the UK's Ministry of Defence, describing the report as “speculative and scaremongering”. It is in the face of slurs of this sort that Nukewatch has over the years patiently uncovered the facts around nuclear warhead transport. Our “speculation” and “scaremongering” has become the accepted and acknowledged reality. Further, accounts in the report which describe the potential consequences of a nuclear warhead transport accident are drawn from the MoD's own Local Authority and Emergency Services Information (LAESI) Edition 11 ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634162/20170627-LAESI-Ed\\_11.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634162/20170627-LAESI-Ed_11.pdf)) and the publicly available information about MOD run exercises the contents of which are alarming.

Check out [Nukewatch.org.uk](http://Nukewatch.org.uk) for how you can help to keep the issue under scrutiny and keep up to speed with developments. There is guidance about writing to your own council if it is on a convoy route and a Petition to the Scottish Government.

Nukewatch 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017