



Ref : FOI2023-044

[REDACTED]

22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

Further to our previous correspondence regarding your request for the following information:

*I would like to request access to the following documents, which I noted that, according to the Kew National Archives, are "Retained by Department under Section 3.4" and are labelled as Atomic Weapons Research Establishment: Nuclear Research (NR) Reports:*

*Operation GRAPPLE Z radiochemistry: part 1, analyses at Christmas Island*

- *ES 6/14*
- *Atomic Weapons Research Establishment: Nuclear Research (NR) Reports.*
- *C SUB-SERIES: RADIOCHEMISTRY WORK.*
- *Covering dates 01/01/1959 - 31/12/1959*
- *C10819845*

*Operation GRAPPLE X radiochemistry: part 1, analyses at Christmas Island*

- *ES 6/9*
- *Atomic Weapons Research Establishment: Nuclear Research (NR) Reports.*
- *C SUB-SERIES: RADIOCHEMISTRY WORK.*
- *Covering dates 01/01/1959 - 31/12/1959*
- *C10819840*

*Operation GRAPPLE Y radiochemistry: part 1, analyses at Christmas Island*

- *ES 6/12*
- *Atomic Weapons Research Establishment: Nuclear Research (NR) Reports.*
- *C SUB-SERIES: RADIOCHEMISTRY WORK.*
- *Covering dates 01/01/1959 - 31/12/1959*
- *C10819843*

*In addition, please will you kindly supply any material relating to radiation exposure or the environmental effects of nuclear testing on Christmas Island (now known as Kiritimati) during the 1950s and 60s which is not accessible via the National Archives.*

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). Please note we split your request into two parts.

We can confirm that the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) holds all of the information in scope of your request regarding the 3 documents that you requested from your searches in The National Archives. However, we are withholding the information under sections 24(1) and 26(1) of the FOI Act. These sections provide that information can be withheld where disclosure would prejudice national security and the defence of the British Isles or any colony.



Sections 24(1) and 26 (1) are qualified exemptions and are subject to the Public Interest Test (PIT). The PIT has been conducted and has fallen in favour of applying the exemption and as such withholding the information in full.

We will now set out arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, along with the reasons for our conclusion.

Exemption 24(1) Safeguarding National Security:

Section 24(1) applies where withholding the information is “required for the purposes of safeguarding national security”. The Act makes a presumption towards disclosure wherever possible and includes a general obligation to promote openness and transparency, and we recognise that there is an interest for the information due to the age.

However, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding national security and in withholding any information that might prejudice it. The retained information has been considered previously and again for this request, and it is still considered highly classified.

Details of the build standards of AWRE trials remain classified because specifics of the components and design of previous nuclear weapons would still be useful to adversaries or third-party states trying to create their own nuclear weapons or trying to find flaws in the UK’s deterrent. Details of previous tests may also inadvertently provide information about the UK’s current warhead, which would give adversaries crucial details about the deterrent and consequently allow them to build up a picture of the UK’s overall capabilities. This would reduce the effectiveness of the deterrent and impinge on the defence of the United Kingdom.

Exemption 26(1) Defence:

Section 26(1) states that information is exempt if its disclosure under the Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice (a) the defence of the British Islands or of any colony, or (b) the capability, effectiveness or security of any relevant forces.

The factors for release are similar to those provided for the use of section 24 in as much as release of the information would provide greater openness and transparency in relation to public spending and public authorities being held to account for their decisions.

However, there is a high likelihood that the release of this information would provide information to an individual or state nation which could consequently prejudice the capability and effectiveness of the UK’s nuclear deterrent and would prejudice the defence of the UK.

Therefore, the PIT falls in favour of withholding the requested information.

We can advise that whilst AWE may hold some information in scope of the subjects you have requested for the second part of your request, we will not be able to answer your request in its entirety without exceeding the appropriate limit set out at Section 12 of the Act.

Section 12 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with these would exceed the appropriate limit, which for public authorities is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 2.25 working days in determining whether the



Aldermaston ▪ Reading  
Berkshire ▪ RG7 4PR

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department holds the information, locating, retrieving and extracting it. In this case, in actioning the second part of your request we would need to retrieve over 1000 pages and extract the relevant information in order to fulfil it.

If you refine the second part of your request so it is more likely to fall under the cost limit, we will consider it again. Please note that if you break it down into several smaller requests, we may still consider that your requests fall under the cost limit in their entirety.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to [information.requests@awe.co.uk](mailto:information.requests@awe.co.uk) or our postal address: Information Requests Team, AWE Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4PR. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team