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of Defence

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Our Ref: FOI2020/04624

23 June 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

Further to our email dated 15th May 2020, we are now able to provide a substantive response to your request, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act), for the following information:

1. *"Is the MOD continuing its review of the AB series during this pandemic, if so does it expect delays to its completion?"*
2. *In my last FOI it was mentioned that the review was being done in batches. Will the MOD publicly release the schedule for which files have been reviewed, and which files it plans to review next?"*
3. *Those files the MOD has reviewed, have they been digitised? If yes, will it send those digitised copies to the National Archives?"*
4. *Finally, has the MOD got a date (or approx date) it expects the review to be completed by?"*

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence and we hold the information below in scope of your first and fourth questions.

The following are extracts are from a document titled *ACRNA May 2020 Meeting - Nuclear Records Review Update dated 17 April 2020* and relate to the review of ES and AB files at the National Archives. The blank spaces represent information that was not in scope of your request.

1. [REDACTED]
This note details the progress since January and the next steps planned, which are currently deferred until Covid 19 restrictions are lifted.

8. [REDACTED]
No end date can be proposed prior to the review at the end of stage 4.

Please note that Section 1 of the Act does not provide a right to ask questions of public authorities, only for recorded information on a particular topic. We have therefore provided the answers to your remaining questions under Section 16(1) of the Act whereby public authorities

have a duty to provide advice and assistance to requesters. To further assist you we have also explained the current review process.

We can confirm that work on the review has been paused until Covid19 restrictions are lifted. This will inevitably cause delays in its completion. The MOD is completing the review of the files in 5 stages, which for ease is set out below:

- Stage 1 was based on two file series which were unlikely to contain sensitive information. Some groups of files have been identified for re-release following this stage, and some files have been identified for more in-depth review at stages 4 and 5.
- Stage 2 is a review of selected records in terms of original classification and stage 3 is based on reviewing records by their date of creation. Once these stages are complete, we expect to be able to re-release a large number of files. The remaining files will be subject to further scrutiny in stages 4 and 5. Stages 4 and 5 will be commenced once Stage 2 and 3 are complete. Until stages 2 and 3 are complete, the MOD will not know which files are to be subject to in-depth review. There will be a review after stage 3 is complete and before we commence stage 4.
- Stages 4 and 5 involve in-depth review of the remaining files and due to the nature of the work this is anticipated to take longer than the previous stages. There will also be a review once stage 4 is complete.

We can confirm that stage 1 of the process has completed and stages 2 and 3 commenced before the Covid19 lockdown. We expect the file reviews to continue when Government restrictions are lifted. There are no plans to release a schedule of files reviewed, or the files yet to be reviewed.

Given the current Covid19 restrictions that remain in place, we are unable to provide an estimate of when activity will resume at pace or when the review will be completed. However, we would expect stages 2 and 3 should be completed within 9-12 weeks of Covid19 restrictions being lifted.

We can also confirm that the only files to have been digitised are those that have been released as a result of requests under terms of the Act. There are no plans to digitise further files and the original files will be returned to The National Archives following their review.

If you are not satisfied with this response or wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact us in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIOFOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliff House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

Defence Nuclear Organisation Secretariat