



David Peattie, FREng HonFNucl | Group Chief Executive Officer

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The Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP
Secretary of State
Department for Energy Security & Net Zero
55 Whitehall
London
[Sent by email]

Our Ref: CEO(23)-0089
11/12/2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for your letter of 4th December regarding the allegations made by the Guardian last week regarding operations at Sellafield Ltd in relation to cyber-security, site safety, and workplace culture.

Sellafield is delivering a very complex mission, with a large and diverse workforce and against an evolving landscape of challenges. However, I can assure you that there is no compromise to public safety, and no complacency when it comes to addressing requisite improvements to cyber-security and site safety and ensuring a zero-tolerance approach toward bullying and harassment of staff.

While some of the allegations referenced by the Guardian were of a long-standing nature going back over ten years and already in the public domain, some were inaccurate and without evidence. The nature of our work means that there will always be challenges, which we are open and honest about, and there will always be scrutiny, which as a public body, we welcome.

However unsubstantiated speculation is damaging – not just for our reputation – but also to stakeholder confidence, including our employees, something which we absolutely depend on to deliver our mission. This is why we are disappointed with the Guardian's handling of the articles and why we have challenged many of the allegations posed such as of a state actor hacking into the Sellafield systems. We have no record or evidence of any such cyber-attack which resulted in malware on Sellafield systems.

Cyber-security

Sellafield has been under significantly enhanced regulatory scrutiny by the ONR since 2022 with regards to cyber-security and this has been an ongoing focus of the Sellafield and NDA Boards. However, it has made extensive efforts to develop a robust plan that demonstrates a route to reducing the level of regulatory scrutiny in the next 12 months and has submitted this plan to the ONR for review. I will separately share this plan with your officials and provide regular updates at the monthly and quarterly governance meetings to provide further confidence that we are making progress.

Respected, included, performing at our best





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There have been necessary changes to the leadership, governance, and risk management of Cyber. There is a new CEO in place, who has re-modelled Sellafield's relationship with the regulator to one of partnership and collaboration, with improved engagement.

Sellafield has moved its cyber function to the Chief Information Officer and will have a new Head of Cyber Security in place from January 2024, ensuring sustained focus and leadership on this matter. The NDA is providing additional services and resources to help alleviate Sellafield's cyber training, staffing and skills gap and boost capability and capacity. Further to this support, the NDA will work with Sellafield to appropriately and proportionately apply assurance to evidence progress in the coming months and years.

As a group, we invest strongly in cyber security, spending approximately £25m each year and are focused on the Implementation of the Civil Nuclear Sector Cyber Strategy (2022), reporting progress to the sector Cyber Security Oversight Group (CSOG). This is a reflection that cyber-security represents one of the biggest challenges facing the nuclear industry, and such threats are treated with the highest level of priority within the NDA group. We have multiple layers of defence in place across our sites including at Sellafield, and the ability to detect and log attacks, threats, and incursions to our systems. I can assure you that any threats that do emerge are properly recorded, reported, and acted upon.

Site safety

As you note, we are dealing with several complex high-hazard facilities at Sellafield, and the site represents one of the biggest environmental remediation challenges in Europe. We work in collaboration with the ONR and Environment Agency (EA) to reduce the most hazardous parts of the site as soon as is feasible and they are satisfied that the risks currently posed are demonstrably "As Low As Reasonably Practicable".

Some of our most hazardous facilities are the legacy ponds and silos (LP&S) and we are now retrieving waste from all four facilities including from the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo (MSSS). However, the scale of the challenge is significant – MSSS refers to 22 silo compartments that together store 11,000m³ of magnesium cladding or 'swarf' stripped from Magnox fuel prior to reprocessing and stored underwater 16 metres deep.

The facility requires constant management and monitoring and whilst we know there was a leak during the 1970s, it subsequently self-sealed. In September 2019 further evidence of a leak was detected. We do not know the exact location of its origin however we know it emanates from the oldest part of the facility which is constructed of six single skin concrete structures which are all hydraulically linked. Whilst Sellafield is undertaking work to try and identify the exact source of the leak, our default position is to assume that it will stop when the waste and hence the water from the entire facility has been emptied. We have explored the feasibility of removing the water in advance of waste retrieval but to do so would create further difficulties.

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Both the ONR and the EA have supported the current planned schedule for the completion of works at MSSS which has a mid-range estimate of 2055, and I will separately share this plan with your officials. An independent review by Sir Andrew Mathews which considered all previous optioneering and technology confirmed that the proposed course of action is the best option.

We fully recognise that this timeline must be accelerated if possible and Sellafield has made concerted efforts to increase the pace of waste retrievals, without compromising safety and security requirements. Improving the use of available storage has increased the retrievals rate and a new waste transfer route has facilitated progress four years ahead of schedule. Further incremental improvement opportunities are being explored alongside learnings from some of the other legacy facilities.

Workplace culture

We will not, and do not, tolerate bullying or harassment of any kind across the NDA group, and creating an inclusive and positive organisational culture and great places to work will always be a focus for our leadership teams. This has been a key aspect of recent staff surveys, and we have seen demonstrable improvements. I have personally championed the development of a group-wide inclusion strategy and introduction of the Speak Up policy on whistleblowing and required all parts of the group to adopt the same to ensure we have robust and consistent monitoring and reporting systems in place.

Sellafield has appointed circa 20 Ethics Ambassadors to assist in the implementation of the group-wide policy and help signpost materials and advice, and offers an independently operated, confidential whistleblowing hotline, Safecall. All concerns raised via any route are fully investigated by trained Corporate Investigators, whose findings are recorded and actioned in accordance with clear and auditable protocols, overseen by the General Counsel and reported in detail to the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) of the NDA Board, as well as to the Sellafield Board.

Staff can access both the Employee Assistance Programme for support and CiC, which is an independent and confidential care service. Additional help is available from over 300 trained Mental Health First Aiders, and 17 employee-led networks are operational covering a range of demographics and interests. There is also a dedicated Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) team who have driven significant progress on all aspects of inclusion and wellbeing with particular focus on reducing bullying and harassment and improving mental health.

A campaign against bullying and harassment in 2019, "Drawing the Line", encouraged people to call out unacceptable behaviours wherever they saw it. As a result, reporting increased and more trained internal investigators were introduced, along with independent internal and external mediation. A seven-year strategic approach to D&I was agreed by the Sellafield Executive in 2021, including specific improvement plans for gender balance, mental health, race at work, LGBT+ and

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mandatory training for all 11,000 employees on D&I. The most recent survey in 2023 showed a positive increase in all 15 D&I areas.

I hope that this letter provides you with the reassurance that we have a robust grip on cyber-security, site safety, and workplace culture, and a clear strategy to deliver improvements where they are needed. You would be most welcome to visit the Sellafield site or indeed any part of the NDA estate to see for yourself the challenges we face and the good progress we are making.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'D. Peattie'.

David Peattie, FEng HonFNucl
Group Chief Executive Officer

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