

Subject Defence
UK Nuclear Systems P+6



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 July 1984

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T127/84

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your letter of 4 July about the recommendation for a Royal Commission to enquire into the British nuclear tests in Australia between 1952 and 1963. I am grateful to you for telling me of this.

I read the Commission's Terms of Reference as designed to meet the need to reassure Australians of the safety of the test programme both at the time and subsequently. This is a concern that the British Government shares.

Your assurance that the Commission will be invited to take in camera evidence drawn from UK classified documents is welcome. I note that you will also consult us before publishing any report by the Commission which refers to such material. While our policy is to make available to the public all British records relevant to the safety of the test programme, there may be other material which we would not wish to see published on grounds, for instance, of national security or our international obligations.

I should like to record that it is our understanding that the Royal Commission will direct its enquiries towards Australian servicemen and civilians and that UK servicemen and civilians remain the concern of the British Government.

The full text of the Commission's Terms of Reference, as announced by Senator Walsh, require it to make

recommendations on the future management and use of the areas where the tests were conducted. The obligations of the British Government, as regards the Maralinga site, were the subject of Memoranda of Arrangements in 1956 and 1968. In 1978, on the understanding that the UK Government would repatriate a quantity of recoverable plutonium from the site, the Australian Government recognised that the UK Government had no further responsibility to repatriate waste from Maralinga.

I note your appreciative remark about co-operation between our Governments in this matter. I assure you that we shall continue to offer our full co-operation.

Yours sincerely
Rangau Dhalter

The Hon R J L Hawke AC MP