

Ref: FOI2026-009

[REDACTED]

13 April 2026

Dear [REDACTED],

We refer to your request for the following information:

** The release of a document open at the National Archives under the reference ES1/951 and titled 'Minor Trials - Maralinga', but withheld in its entirety on national security grounds.*

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

We can confirm that AWE holds all of the information in scope of your request. However, it is exempt from disclosure under sections 21 and 22 of the Act. All seven parts of ES1/951 have been available at The National Archives for several years with placeholders advising of pages in Part One being retained in Department (MoD).

As these extracts that are retained in department are scheduled for future publication, they are exempt from disclosure under section 22(1)(b) of the Act. It is reasonable in all circumstances for the information to be withheld until the planned publication takes place.

Under section 16, the duty of a public authority to provide advice and assistance, you might find helpful to note that although Part One is included in the Merlin publication exercise, it specifically details weapon design; particularly the initiation which is a subject of interest to proliferators. It consists of 14 separate enclosures, which due to the continued sensitivity will require redaction under section 24(1) national security and section 26(1) defence to the extent of rendering them meaningless.

The remaining six parts of ES1/951 are publicly available via the Discovery catalogue. Accordingly, this information is exempt from disclosure under section 21 of the Act, as it is reasonably accessible to you by other means at the link below:

[Minor trials at Maralinga | The National Archives](#)

Sections 22, 24 and 26 are qualified exemptions and subject to a Public Interest Test (PIT) which means that the information requested can only be withheld if the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

We can confirm the PIT has been conducted and it has concluded that the extracts from part one of ES1/951 should be withheld in full.

For each of the exemptions applied, we will now set out arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest with the reasons for our conclusion.

Section 22

AWE recognises the strong public interest in openness, transparency and accountability in accordance with the Act.

In considering the public interest in maintaining the exemption, AWE notes that the information is intended for future publication and is currently subject to an established pre-publication processes. Disclosure at this stage would undermine those processes and would result in diverting the attention from the small team involved in the publication exercise.

While there is a general public interest in disclosure, we consider that it is reasonable for the public to wait until the planned publication has taken place. On balance, we have concluded that the public interest is better served by withholding the information at this time under Section 22 of the Act.

Section 24 and 26

The Act is based on a presumption towards disclosure wherever possible and includes a general obligation to promote openness and transparency. Access to historic material can assist the public and researchers in understanding the Design of the nuclear weapon.

However, there is a paramount public interest in ensuring that national security is not compromised through disclosure. Section 24(1) of the Act permits a public authority to withhold information where its release would increase the vulnerability of the United Kingdom or its citizens to threats to national security. The withheld material contains sensitive technical and design-related information relating to nuclear weapons.

Disclosure could reveal aspects of nuclear weapons design or capability which may be misused by hostile actors or contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, thereby posing serious risks to both national and global security. Although the information is historic, aspects of it remain sensitive and relevant and could be exploited to draw inferences about current or enduring design principles. Release of the information, particularly when considered alongside other information already in the public domain, would increase the risk of sensitive inferences being drawn through a cumulative or “mosaic” effect. This could undermine the confidentiality of nuclear weapons design principles, reduce the effectiveness of the United Kingdom’s nuclear deterrent, and materially increase risks to national security. There is also a strong public interest in maintaining the secure handling of highly sensitive information, as protecting such material supports effective and trusted information-sharing and ensures continued confidence that information critical to national security remains appropriately safeguarded.

In addition, there is a strong public interest in preventing the disclosure of information that could prejudice the defence of the United Kingdom. The withheld material contains defence-related technical information which, if disclosed, would be highly likely to undermine current or future defence capabilities. Although the documents are historic, elements of the information remain sensitive and relevant to contemporary defence arrangements. Disclosure could increase risks to defence infrastructure, defence assets, or those involved in defence-related activities, and could weaken the United Kingdom’s ability to protect its defence interests effectively. There is also a significant public interest in maintaining the secure handling of sensitive defence information, which supports effective cooperation and trusted information-sharing both within government and with defence partners, thereby safeguarding the effectiveness and security of the UK’s defence posture.

While the public interest in transparency and historical scrutiny is acknowledged, it is outweighed by the very strong and continuing public interest in safeguarding national security and the defence of the United Kingdom. The potential harm arising from disclosure is serious and enduring. The public interest therefore favours maintaining the exemptions under sections 24(1) and 26(1) of the Act, and the information withheld accordingly.

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 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