

CORE FoIA questions

Re: HLW transport to Holland on Atlantic Osprey: Could you raise the following, under the Freedom of Information Act, with International Nuclear Services (INS) or other appropriate quarter.

The HLW flask was loaded onto the Atlantic Osprey around midday Thursday 11th March 2010 with the expectation of departing Barrow on the evening tide the same day. Departure was however delayed for 24 hours, the ship sailing on the evening tide Friday 12th March.

Q1. What was the reason for the 24 hour delay ?

With a 12th March evening departure from Barrow, the Atlantic Osprey might be expected to arrive at its Vlissingen destination within around two days - at some time on 14th March. In the event, the ship docked at Vlissingen around 2100 hrs on Tuesday 16th March - ie 4 days after leaving Barrow. Further, AIS ship tracking systems showed the Atlantic Osprey to have dramatically reduced speed and diverted from its course to Vlissingen on a numerous occasions from 14th March onwards -until its arrival at Vlissingen. Effectively, AIS tracking shows the Atlantic Osprey to have been 'swanning around' somewhat aimlessly between the Dutch and UK coastlines for a period well in excess of 24 hours.

Q2. What was the reason for the ship's speed reductions and course changes for a period well in excess of 24 hours ?

Q3. Are such delays not contrary to the conditions of the transport licence which require nuclear cargos to be delivered without undue delay ?

Q4. Are such delays, in busy shipping channels, not only compromising the safety of the cargo but also the safety of other marine traffic ?

INS answers

The repatriation of Dutch highly active waste was completed safely and successfully and to schedule marking a further successful reduction in foreign waste stored at Sellafield.

When undertaking these transports, priority is given to the safety and security of the cargo, our employees, the public and the environment. Speed is not the principal factor and we operate with great care and diligence - as we believe would be reasonably expected - to ensure that safety and security is maintained. We are also very careful to ensure that we comply with the terms of the required licences and approvals and all of these requirements were met in this case.

We do not comment on the detailed arrangements for any shipments. However, in the planning of all shipments we must take into account a wide range of factors which may affect the duration of the shipment. These might

arise during consigning, the rail journey and loading, the impact of adverse weather and specific needs of customers, infrastructure providers and statutory authorities in the UK and overseas. Nor, for security reasons, do we want to make the pattern of our voyages predictable. This voyage was no exception. The whole operation was conducted safely and smoothly.

Subject to the limitation that we never discuss the specific individual details of our shipments the answers to the individual questions are as follows:

Q1 - Containers are loaded into the flask in accordance with a pre-agreed loading plan which gives the positions of each of the containers within the flask. During unloading of the VRR flask in Japan, it was found that although the correct containers were loaded into the flask channels (each channel holds four containers) the channel numbers did not correspond to the numbers on the loading plan provided to the customer. This issue was investigated by Sellafield Ltd and traced to an anomaly in the Flask Loading Operator Instruction.

Whilst this had no safety significance, it did have a minor operational impact for the customer.

Having received information from Japan prior to the Dutch return, the loading arrangements for the Dutch VRR shipment were checked. This check caused a minor delay in the departure of the shipment from Barrow to the Netherlands. Arrival was however on time to programme. This check was taken with the full knowledge of regulators and customers and the transport was carried out successfully and in full regulatory compliance.

Q2 - The Dutch authorities requested that the MVAO arrive in Vlissingen at a specific time. To achieve arrival at a specific time following a sea journey of some 650 miles, typically taking some three days, there must be considerable contingency in the allowed journey time to take account of the possibility of bad weather. In this case the weather was fair and accordingly the voyage contingency time was expended towards the end of the journey and away from main shipping lanes.

Q3 - The cargo was delivered in accordance with all of the relevant national and international regulations.

Q4 - The safety of the crew, the cargo and other vessels are of paramount importance in our marine operations. The navigation and operation of the MVAO on this occasion ensured that the high standards of marine safety required for our operations were maintained at all times. (see also answer to question 2)