

THE LORD COAKER
MINISTER FOR THE HOUSE OF LORDS

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08 August 2024

Dear Lord Empey,

I am writing to respond to your question during the King's Speech Debate on 25 July regarding viable alternatives to Rosyth for the maintenance and repair of the Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) aircraft carriers, should Babcock's dry-docking facilities at Rosyth be unavailable.

I should begin by explaining that there are several levels of maintenance undertaken at different stages in the operational cycle for the QEC aircraft carriers. The baseline level of maintenance is undertaken and managed by the ship's staff, while the aircraft carrier is operational. An intermediate level of maintenance (beyond ship's staff capacity or skills) is undertaken with Contractor support, normally alongside and afloat (not dry dock) in the ship's base port, HMNB Portsmouth. The carriers also need to undertake routine dry-docking to maintain safety certification every six years. During these periods maintenance is focussed on elements that cannot be maintained whilst afloat and those which are mandated to achieve Lloyds Register Classification Society requirements such as underwater hull valves and shaft bearings.

The afloat maintenance and repair activity for the QEC aircraft carriers is undertaken by one of our industry partners, BAE Systems (and their sub-contractors); under the Future Management Support Programme (FMSP) they are contractually obliged to provide maintenance services until 2028. Dry dockings are undertaken under a separate contract with Babcock Rosyth, secured through open competition until 2030.

I can assure you that if Babcock's Rosyth facilities were unavailable for whatever reason, and an urgent requirement arose that required an alternative location for dry-docking the QEC aircraft carriers, Defence has the resilience to service the carriers elsewhere. This includes using commercial facilities within the UK and overseas or using those of our Allies and partners.

The Lord Empey
House of Lords
London
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As part of our contingency planning, the MOD maintains a comprehensive assessment of suitable docking locations in the UK and overseas for all MOD Shipping. The last periodic review of suitable UK facilities where the QEC aircraft carriers could be dry-docked without significant infrastructure investment identified: Babcock, Rosyth; Harland & Wolff (H&W), Belfast; and Able UK, Seaton Port Teeside. It is noted that all of these are commercial facilities, and their continuing suitability is a matter for the site operator.

H&W's dry-dock in Belfast remains a viable UK alternative for the dry-docking of QEC aircraft carriers and the company will be invited to tender again when the existing contract is due for renewal.

I hope this helps to explain the position and provides some assurance that the MOD has the appropriate contingencies in place.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vernon Coaker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

THE LORD COAKER