

Written evidence submitted by Admiral Tony Radakin, First Sea Lord, Ministry of Defence

Temporary Reduction in Frigate & Destroyer (FFDD) Hull Numbers and Increased Availability

Following the HCDC background briefing session in July and the HCDC session with the Minister for Defence Procurement on 2 November, I agreed to provide a note to explain how, in practice, removing two frigate hulls can lead to increased frigate availability, and also to comment on ship availability more generally.

There is clearly a relationship between the number of ships in the Royal Navy and how many days of availability for operations we can deliver. That relationship is, however, a complex one, driven by how much resource, in both people and money, is available to crew and support those ships and how much time they must spend in deep maintenance.

Our examination of the schedule, coupled with regulatory changes permitting us to operate Type 23s for six years between major refits, led us to develop a plan as part of our Integrated Review proposition, based on the following:

- The refit schedule had become disconnected from the funded programme of record, resulting in frigates being planned to retire only a few years after being re-fitted;
- Older Type 23 refits are increasingly costly, whereas sustaining a Type 23 on operations post refit is significantly cheaper;
- Extending three ships in service (HM Ships ARGYLL, LANCASTER and IRON DUKE) to get maximum value from their funded or completed refits **generates an additional 135 months of availability**;
- Running these ships for longer clearly comes at a cost, so we funded this by cancelling the refits for HM Ships MONMOUTH and MONTROSE, releasing around £100 million, and retiring them in July 2021 and July 2023 respectively;
- HM Ships MONMOUTH and MONTROSE were due to be in lengthy refits between 2021-2024, before retiring in 2026-27, so their deletion has **only removed 51 months of availability**;

- The combined effect of these measure thus generated an **additional 84 months** of General Purpose Type 23 availability between 2021-2029, a **55% increase over the pre-IR plan**; and,
- These extensions also more effectively bridge the gap between the Type 23 force and Types 26 and 31, giving us availability **when we need it**, and not over-investing in our older platforms.

So, whilst FFDD hull numbers will dip to 17 by the end of 2023, the numbers of ships we will have **available for operations** is improved by this measure.

Alongside making best use of the force we have, driving up *relative* availability, we remain committed to growing the escort force and further increasing the *absolute* number of days available for operations we provide to the nation. We anticipate returning above 19 FFDD by the end of 2026 as new ships are brought into service. The projected in service dates for these ships, and the time required for sea trials and commissioning activity, have been modelled against the out of service dates of the Type 23 force, to ensure that we always have sufficient units to deliver on our Defence Plan commitments, whether that be protecting our nuclear deterrent or delivering presence around the globe.

Furthermore, the additional availability that the IR provided in the OPV force, through the extension of the Batch 1 OPVs in Home Waters, has allowed us to use the Batch 2 OPVs to deliver some tasks overseas to which a Frigate or Destroyer would have been attributed previously. The excellent availability we are getting from these new ships, forward deployed with a sustainable crewing model, is supporting our presence around the globe whilst we transition to the future frigate force. This, I hope, addresses the concerns the Committee had about any gap in availability during the transition to the new Frigates entering service.

As new ships are brought into service, they will require less maintenance than those they replace, reaping the benefits of modern technology and further improving relative availability. We are also committed to several initiatives, under Projects RESOLUTION (Submarines) and RENOWN (Surface Ships), to shorten refits and speed up routine maintenance of the existing fleet. The collective effect of all these measures will be a much more available Fleet, delivering a better return on the investment the Ministry of Defence has made in the Royal Navy, and providing more days on operations for the nation.

I hope that this has answered your questions and addressed the concerns that the Committee had.

23rd November 2021