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Government Legal Department

Piers Doggart
Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan

By Email

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Your ref:

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18 September 2026

Dear Piers,

Re: Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan – DAS Update

We write in response to the Inquiry's letter of 18 August concerning the updates provided to the Inquiry regarding DAS, and in response to the Inquiry's letter of 16 September.

AIRU apologises profusely for the delay in responding. We can assure the Inquiry that AIRU has been working on the response since the Inquiry's letter of 18 August was received. Unfortunately, some of these issues have proven complex to resolve and have required cross-departmental engagement. We apologise for not updating the Inquiry that this work was ongoing.

We have provided answers to all the Inquiry's queries, adopting the paragraph lettering used in the Inquiry's letter of 18 August.

Regarding the hearing on 25 September, we respectfully suggest that Nick Gurr, Director of AIRU would be better placed to attend and provide assistance to the Inquiry as Mr Gurr is much more familiar with the background material and has provided his statement with regards to a number of Rule 9 disclosure exercises to the Inquiry in response to R9.54.

DAS File Upload

- a) *Please could you say when MODLT / AIRU were made aware that the substantial upload of documents by DAS (that took place on 26 July 2026) would take place?*

In January 2026 DAS discussed with AIRU the need for DAS 'downtime' in March 2026 in order to ingest a large dataset known as HPRM (Hewlett Packard Record Management). AIRU's understanding was that this was a very large amount of material related to the period 2014-2021 which could impact

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R9 searches that had been carried out. AIRU therefore requested further information from DAS in order to update the Inquiry. DAS responded that it was too early at that stage to determine ingestion timings or record counts, and confirmed they would update when the workstream had progressed further. The ingestion did not go ahead in March.

On 27 April 2026 AIRU attended a 'DAS Ingestion Priorities' progress meeting with DAS and DJEP. Following the meeting (also on 27 April 2026) AIRU were provided with an excel spreadsheet which amongst other things included a tab entitled 'Datasets'. This tab confirmed that work on the HPRM dataset was 'in progress'. The spreadsheet did not contain any further information regarding the contents of the dataset. On 17 July 2026 DAS confirmed that there would be system downtime on 23-24 July 2026 to facilitate the HPRM dataset being brought online and confirmed that at that point DAS's understanding was that the new number of unique file hashes was 253,101,116.

b) Please could you say what is the MODLT / AIRU understanding of the reason for this upload?

As you are aware, DAS periodically uploads material to the searchable side of the electronic archive, and records will continue to be added to DAS in future. This was another periodic upload; on 17 July DAS confirmed to AIRU that: *HPRM back-up covers approximate years 2014-2021, though the data contained within could be dated earlier.*

AIRU understood from this that it was not expected that the HPRM data set would contain a significant amount of data relating to the period covered by the Inquiry's terms of reference, although of course the back-up containing earlier data could not be entirely ruled out. AIRU proceeded on this basis and continued to be under this assumption as recently as 04 August 2026 when the following question was posed to DAS:

Firstly, is it possible that there are now more documents that fall within a 2010-2013 date range? And, if so, would you be able to precisely quantify that number? I know the latest ingestion is for 2014 onwards but we thought there could be a chance that some documents may be dated in our Terms of Reference.

It was not until 05 August that AIRU understood that - based on file creation metadata - the HPRM back up contained 97 million files dated between 2010-2013. We can only apologise for this misunderstanding and the impact it has had on the Inquiry.

c) We note that the upload has resulted in a de-duplicated addition of 159 million documents, of which 97 million relate to the period covered by the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. However, we also note that there has as of yet been no assessment of those documents for relevance to the Terms of Reference. It seems to us obvious that we need to agree quickly on targeted and proportionate search terms to assess the potential volume of relevant material.

AIRU has been working with DAS, as a matter of urgency, attempting to agree a process to 're-run' searches for the following R9s; R9.18(S), R9.359(S) and R9.361(S) and an aspect of the R9.21(S) Phase 3A searches. This will allow AIRU and the Inquiry to understand the 'delta' created by the HPRM upload in respect of a small number of R9s representing both image and documents returns, across different DDOs. AIRU and DAS are working to provide the Inquiry - in advance of the hearing on 25 September - (i) initial 'delta' volumetrics for these R9s or a confirmation that due to the increased size of the upload it is no longer technically possible to re-run the searches in their original format and - (ii) a plan for next steps, in light of these volumetrics.

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DAS Folders

- a) *We assume, but please can you confirm, that the material referred to under this topic is separate from the material uploaded on 26 July 2026?*

Yes, this is correct.

- b) *Please could you explain why these folders were not captured by the search terms in the first instance?*
- h) *Please could you provide full detail of the 'improved search methodology' that you intend to apply going forward, for which searches this will be used, and where necessary what are the differences between this and the prior search methodology?*

The "back-end search" methodology previously used when searching the DAS failed to account for file naming conventions now being searched for. In response to ongoing AIRU research the DAS identified a form of IEF folder naming convention that up until this point had been unknown and had not been seen before in other folder structures held on the DAS. On doing so the DAS research team presented this finding to AIRU to enable these findings to be onward discussed with the IIRTA.

The "back-end" folders were identified after a "back-end search" of the DAS file structure was undertaken. The file structure is representative of whatever files structure was present when the records were passed over to the archive, including metadata and programme data. DAS staff attempted to align and match the imported file structure as closely as possible to the original structure, but there may be technical reasons as to why this would deviate in some instances. The files and folders are routinely available on the DAS system, and theoretically text-based data contained within these folders could have been found using by an ordinary Boolean search of the file content.

Due to the task focusing on the discovery of image files, a different research approach option was taken whereby the DAS were tasked to discover material with a more complex search using the folder name. This is not a standard function provided by the DAS system, so staff undertook an ad-hoc task to run a query against the database backend files which contained folder-structure metadata. This led to the repeatable "back-end search" method, reproduced for the first time in R9.376(S).

For R9s where the new "back-end search" method may provide additional material AIRU proposes to liaise the Inquiry (as we did recently in relation to R9.410(S), see letter of 7 August 2026) to agree whether – on a case-by-case basis – the Inquiry wishes for DAS to include searching the back-end IEF folder structures to ensure that all the files are captured by the search. Whilst back-end searches using the new methodology will likely capture more potentially relevant material this comes at a time cost.

- i) *We assume that you do not intend to convey that the metric by which an 'improved search methodology' should be judged is '[returning] a higher volume of search material'. We would hope that an improved methodology would rather produce a quicker set of material responsive to the search terms and therefore a and more reliable set of relevant material. It would be helpful to understand how your amendments to the methodology will help to achieve that.*

In order to provide relevant material, the volume of material from the different sources is an important factor. The more sources DAS can identify, the larger the database of potentially relevant documentation which can be searched for present and future R9 requests. The Inquiry's requests vary greatly in character and it would not be appropriate for DAS to rely on fewer sources of information as "reliable", in order to provide returns.

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- c) *Please can you confirm details of the volume of material contained within these folders, and by when you expect the review of this material to be complete?*
- d) *Please, when providing any updating Rule 9 material, could you identify it as having been derived from this additional cohort of material?*
- g) *Please could you indicate by when you expect to provide those images to the Inquiry, both in the event that there is no third-party equity, and in the event that there is what proposal you would make for the Inquiry to be able to have access to the material?*

This material is in the process of being reviewed and will be provided to the Inquiry as soon as possible next week. We will ensure that when this material is provided it will be made clear that it is derived from this additional cohort of material. It covers R9s 100(S), 110(S), 357(S), 359(S), 361(S) and 378(S). The documents relevant to R9.100(S) were disclosed to the Inquiry this week. There were 199 relevant documents from the IEF folders, relating to R9.100(S), 189 of which had already been disclosed to the Inquiry in previous disclosures.

In our letter of 6 August, we indicated that there were around 130 relevant documents from the IEF folders. This was incorrect, due to the omission of duplicate documents already held on Relativity in our 'batching out' of the IEF documents for review. Upon further inspection of these batches, after 6 August, it was discovered that not all IEF sourced documents had been included in batches. These remaining documents have now been reviewed and are now undergoing pre-production checks before disclosure, however we anticipate the majority of these to be duplicate documents.

- d) *Please could you set out the detail of the additional targeted searches that AIRU instructed DAS to undertake which has led to the identification of the tranche of additional image files?*

Once DAS became aware of the back-end folder structure, they informed AIRU that these folders existed and contained image file types. AIRU instructed DAS to search for these image file types in all the back-end file structures that were related to folders that had been searched previously for Rule 9 requests relating to imagery.

- e) *Please could you explain the basis on which 130 of those images have been found to be relevant, i.e. what is the test for relevance that has been applied?*

These images have been linked to folder structures which indicate they were taken on DDOs the Inquiry have requested imagery from, in line with all of our previous imagery disclosure. The images have been reviewed for their content. We do not withhold imagery that may potentially be from a DDO unless there are third-party equity issues. The Inquiry may receive imagery which it does not find relevant for its purposes, but AIRU takes a broad approach to what might potentially be considered relevant to ensure nothing is missed, and as such, images that are heavily blurred or potentially less useful to the Inquiry are included.

To reiterate, AIRU is extremely sorry for the delay in providing this information to the Inquiry and hopes this assists the Inquiry in its efforts. If the Inquiry has any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We remain fully committed to assisting the Inquiry with all aspects of the disclosure exercise. We would appreciate further dialogue with the Inquiry legal team to discuss next steps for the disclosure work so that an agreed way forward can be established for carrying out the remaining work and for internal prioritisation. MOD stands ready to adopt whatever strategy for prioritisation of work best supports the objectives of the Inquiry's investigation and timetable, and will apply the full extent of the resources at our disposal to do so.

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Yours sincerely,

MOD Legal Team