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HOME NEWS

Submarine curb urged to protect fishing boats

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A CAMPAIGN was launched last night for an international code of practice to protect fishing boats in submarine exercise areas.

This comes after a demand by Labour MP Mr George Foulkes for a Government inquiry into the loss of 17 British fishing vessels over the past seven years.

Seven of the boats apparently disappeared in submarine exercise areas, according to Mr Foulkes, who claims that this justifies a joint inquiry by the Defence and Transport Ministries.

The Irish are particularly concerned about encounters with nuclear submarines. The Republic's government is certain to press for a code of practice to ensure that submarines steer clear of fishing operations.

At present fishing boat skippers

get warnings in admiralty charts, such as: "Submarines exercise frequently, both surfaced and dived, in the areas south and west of the Isle of Man. A good look-out is to be kept for them when passing through these waters."

The International Maritime Organisation will meet in London later this year to discuss a recommendation from its safety committee, headed by a Soviet representative.

The recommendation puts the onus on submarines, unless disabled, to take avoiding action in fishing grounds.

Neither the Irish nor the Celtic League, which persuaded the Republic's Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Peter Barry, to go to the IMO, believe that the recommendation is strong enough to protect fishing fleets.

The league general secretary, Mr Bernard Moffatt, said from

the Isle of Man, where fishing boats have disappeared in the so-called Manx triangle: "We're fully in favour of the demand by Mr Foulkes for an inquiry."

"However, it's not the full answer because there has been evidence of the presence of British, American, French, and Dutch submarines, and at least one incident involving a Soviet submarine. It's necessary to campaign for an international code of practice."

He said that the Irish Sea and the Pembroke Strait seemed to have become the haunt of nuclear submarines from a number of countries. There had been 24 incidents involving submarines or warships in the past seven years.

Mr Foulkes called for a Government inquiry because the disappearance of seven British fishing boats in submarine exercise areas is "appalling."

He said: "Fishermen face enough natural hazards without adding the potential hazard of surfacing submarines. An inquiry could establish if submarines were responsible for the losses."

If this were proven, action should be taken to eliminate or minimise the dangers.

The list does not include the Kirkcudbright fishing boat Mhari L, which went down with her crew of five off the Isle of Man two years ago. She is said to have sunk when her trawling gear fouled an underwater cable.

Mr Foulkes is demanding a fresh investigation into the Mhari L in the light of an Irish trawler's encounter with a US submarine.

The Summer Morn was towed backwards for three hours after catching the submarine in her nets.