

MPs infuriated as submarine runs continue

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A GOVERNMENT concession that work on warning beepers for fishing boats would be accelerated after the sinking of the Antares by a nuclear submarine last week with the loss of four lives, failed to satisfy angry opposition MPs yesterday.

The armed forces minister, Archie Hamilton, was branded as "insensitive and complacent" by Labour MPs after a stormy meeting during which requests for the suspension of underwater submarine activities in fishing grounds were again rejected.

The five Scottish MPs who attended the meeting were infuriated by Mr Hamilton's repetition of his description of the incident, in which the fishing boat was dragged to the bottom by a submarine in the hands of a commander-in-training, as a freak one-off accident.

They also criticised his argument that the sinking should be put into perspective as only one of many fishing boat losses.

During the meeting, Mr Hamilton also refused to halt underwater operations until a meeting between the Clyde Fishermen's Association and the Navy could agree on measures to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy which has stunned the village of Carradale on the Mull of Kintyre.

The Liberal Democrat MP Ray Michie, whose constituency includes the village, in an earlier meeting won agreement from Mr Hamilton that

he would look again at the possibility of increasing submarine training at the weekend, when fishermen are less active in the Firth of Clyde.

However, Mrs Michie, who also failed to win any suspension of operations, commented: "I am still dissatisfied with the minister's claim that this was a freak accident. The same accident could happen at any minute."

Labour's Scottish home affairs spokesman, Brian Wilson, who led the Labour group's delegation, stated: "I have yet to encounter a more arrogant and complacent individual than Mr Hamilton. It was a very angry meeting."

"He would not budge an inch towards accepting that a general problem exists and persisted in talking about a freak, one-off tragedy."

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence afterwards confirmed that the trials of the Seamatrix transponder — bleeper — which would help submarines detect fishing nets would be speeded up.

A spokesman for Royal Navy at Faslane also confirmed that a submarine would be made available to help with aspects of the underwater testing. The vessel, which has yet to be selected, would help within the next few weeks.

Yesterday, HMS Trenchant, the hunter-killer submarine which is said to have dragged the Antares to her end, was in dry dock