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Trawlermen call for end to sub exercises

By KEITH BRUCE

THE OWNERS of the trawler *Lupina*, whose nets were snagged by a US submarine in the North Channel between Scotland and Northern Ireland on Wednesday night, yesterday joined calls for an end to submarine exercises in the Irish Sea.

The incident, which recalled the loss of the Campbeltown trawler *Antares* with its crew of four two years ago, followed a number of accidents involving Northern Irish vessels and submarines.

Mr Ian Campbell, one of the owners of the *Lupina*, said that, at the time of the incident, the skipper of the vessel Mr Paul Johnson was on watch. The force of the submarine catching the nets stopped the vessel's progress and hauled it backwards and over on its side.

Mr Johnson went below to warn the crew and had to wade through waist deep water to return on deck. The vessel's stern was submerged before the steel hawsers holding the nets snapped and the boat righted itself.

"If that hadn't happened, the boat would have become another question-mark in the list of mysterious losses," said Mr Campbell.

He said that the submarine had surfaced and made radio contact with the trawler after the incident, but the American seamen had seemed surprised that the vessel was still afloat.

The nuclear-powered *USS Sturgeon*, the first of the nuclear-powered *Sturgeon* class and built in the 1960s, was yesterday being towed back to the Faslane navy base on the Clyde by a Royal Navy tug, her propeller fouled by the trawl gear of the fishing boat.

The US Navy has ordered an inquiry into the incident. Separation rules were introduced after the *Antares* tragedy, and submarines should now keep 4000 yards away from fishing boats when dived or 1500 yards when at periscope depth.

A Royal Navy spokeswoman at the Faslane submarine base on the Clyde said: "Coastguard contacted us on our fishing hotline. At the time, the fishing vessel was working in an area which had been notified as a submarine operating area under our subfax scheme."

Mr Campbell, however, was scathing about the Navy's notification procedures, which were introduced after the *Antares* disaster.

He said: "The North Channel is a big area. It is up to them to steer clear of small wooden fishing vessels."

Skipper Paul Johnson, 29, also condemned the US Navy: "I think it is a disgrace. It's hard enough making a living at the moment without this carry on."

"What are we meant to do? We are in the fishing grounds trying to make a living and we come home in debt because these guys are playing games."

The Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Association

said yesterday that the system which warns fishing vessels of submarines in the Irish Sea was not working.

Association chief Dick James said: "I shall be making very strong representations to the submarine branch of the Royal Navy telling them their mechanisms for avoiding fishing vessels are still deficient despite the *Antares* and other tragedies."

The National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations also expressed outrage at the incident.

Mr Bill Madine, chairman of the federation's west coast committee and another part-owner of the *Lupina*, said: "This incident came within a fraction of another tragedy and clearly indicates that the agreements reached earlier this year on safety zones are not sufficient to protect our men and vessels from submerged submarines."

Labour Front Bench defence spokesman George Foulkes, an honorary president of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, called for a ban on submarines in recognised fishing areas.

In a letter to Defence Minister Mr Archie Hamilton Mr Foulkes called for an assurance that a full inquiry would be held into the incident, reminding the Minister of previous statements that the Royal Navy is responsible for all movements of Nato submarines in British waters.

Figures in a land



Miller on the roof garden of its office at Tanfield House

Council blocks 10% rises for of

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