

6/12/90  
SCOTSMAN

# Fishermen win details from MoD of Clyde subs' routes

By Lawrence Donegan

THE Ministry of Defence gave in to pressure from Scottish fishermen yesterday and agreed in future to disclose details of all submarine movements in the Firth of Clyde.

The disclosures will be the first breach to the information blackout on the operations of the British submarine fleet for at least 45 years. Hitherto, submarine movements were regarded by the Government as among the most sensitive of defence secrets.

All 24 UK submarines operating will be covered by the new rules, including the four Polaris-class vessels, which are frequent visitors to the Clyde. United States navy submarines travelling to and from the Holy Loch will also be obliged to give details of movements in the firth, an MoD spokesman said.

The concession came at a one-hour meeting between Clyde fishermen's representatives and Archie Hamilton, the defence minister, on the sinking of the trawler *Antares* with the loss of four men.

Submarine movements in the Clyde have been suspended until tomorrow, when fishermen's representatives will meet senior Royal Navy officers at Faslane to discuss how advance notice of the times and locations of underwater manoeuvres will be made known.

Mr Hamilton, who conceded it was "very likely" that the *Antares* was pulled down by a submarine, also agreed to bring forward trials of a prototype bleeper designed to help passing submarines to detect fishing nets. Fishermen's leaders have been invited to attend the trials at Raasay later this month.

Patrick Stewart, secretary of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, welcomed what he said was an extraordinary change in policy by the MoD. "We already have considerable co-operation about what goes on in surface operations and this will now be extended to submarine operations," he said. "It is tragic that this change in policy should only happen after four of our men have died.

"In future the Clyde Fishermen's Association will be notified in advance of which areas are being operated in by submarines. Much

agree the details but I think there is considerable goodwill on both sides."

Mr Stewart said he had been assured by ministry officials that submarine activity in the Firth of Clyde area would be substantially reduced in the period up to Christmas. It seems unlikely that a proposed blockade of the navy base at Faslane by his members will go ahead.

An MoD spokesman said the agreement would be limited to the Clyde area. "We will have to assess over a period of time how this works in practice and just how much notification needs to be made," he said. "Different considerations may apply to other sea areas and any extension will have to be judged on its merits."

Mr Hamilton, who withdrew his earlier description of the *Antares* accident as a "freak" during yesterday's meeting, said that the end of the Cold War had made a change in policy possible. The tragedy had accelerated that process.

He said on BBC Radio: "In the light of this terrible tragedy of the loss of this fishing boat, we really did not feel we could go on in the same way."

The Liberal Democrat MP Ray Michie, whose Argyll and Bute constituency covers Carradale, home of the *Antares* crew, said the MoD's announcement was a significant step forward.

"People in Carradale are still stunned but I think that they feel, to a certain extent, that if the minister's undertaking reduces significantly the chances of another such accident their men will not have died altogether in vain."

Brian Wilson, Labour's Scottish fisheries spokesman, said the MoD's apparent change of mind was overdue.

Between 100 and 200 women from Carradale, Campbelltown, Tarbert, Ayr, Dunure, Maidens, Rothesay, Tighnabruaich and Gourrock are expected to hold a vigil outside the Faslane base today. Sheila Galbraith, vigil co-ordinator, said that it would go ahead to maintain the pressure for an agreement on paper to which everyone could adhere.