

US navy denies submarine endangered trawler

By Alan Dron

UNCERTAINTY last night surrounded an incident off the Mull of Kintyre in which a Northern Ireland trawler lost part of its net while a US nuclear submarine was in the area.

With the submarine now at sea, it will be next week before a US navy investigation can determine whether the vessel — thought to be a ballistic missile boat which had been on the surface — fouled the rear of the Bangor-registered Green Eagle, late on Thursday night.

The Department of Transport is also awaiting details of the incident before deciding whether to launch an inquiry. The inquiry decision could depend on verifying the dis-

tance between the two vessels involved.

The trawler's skipper, Preston Scott, put it at about a quarter of a mile; the US sub commander said he was never closer than 2,000 yards from the nearest fishing vessel.

This latest incident involving fishermen and submarines came as Stuart Campbell, a member of the crew of the Carradale-registered Antares, was yesterday buried in Campbeltown. His vessel was dragged under, apparently after its nets were fouled by the British submarine Trenchant.

The Green Eagle was one of a group of boats from Northern Ireland fishing five miles south-west of the Mull of Kintyre when Mr Scott said he felt a shudder in the trawl wire. Unsure of what was



Close call? Preston Scott displays a ruined fishing net

happening, he only started hauling in his gear a few minutes later when it began rising sharply. The crew then suddenly saw a submarine about a quarter of a mile behind their vessel, he said.

"There were 13 or 14 boats fishing in that vicinity. There should be no submarine anywhere near them. To come in through them is suicide."

He said he had unsuccessfully called the submarine on the marine distress channel, but: "He just sped away ... towards the Atlantic."

The US Navy's public affairs officer at the Holy Loch, Lt Steven Lowry, said the submarine had been at no time submerged. It was normal practice to operate its surface search radar in such conditions.

"She knew there were several fishing vessels in the area. She was operating under a lot of caution because of [them]."

The importance of discovering the distance between the Green Eagle and the sub-

marine was emphasized by Patrick Stewart, secretary of the Clyde Fishermen's Association. "If the sub is correct when it says it was closer than a mile, it should not have snagged the net."

The depth of a submarine is not known; with its distance from the surface being unknown, it may have had to have been a quarter of a mile or more from the surface to have fouled it.

Local MPs were demanding that the conduct covering the Clyde, due to come on Monday, be extended to cover Britain's entire coast.

However, the arr minister, Archie Johnston, claimed it was "very difficult to place the blame for yesterday's incident on the US submarine. Safety re-

Navy starts giving locations of submarines to fishermen

By Christine Cessford

SCOTSMAN 17/12/90

THE Royal Navy breaks its silence on submarine activities in the Clyde for the first time today, when safety procedures to protect fishing boats come into force.

Fishermen will be told where submerged submarine operations are taking place after talks earlier this month between representatives from the navy and Clyde Fishermen's Association.

The location of submerged submarine operations during a 12-hour period will be relayed from the naval base at Faslane to the coastguard, who will broadcast the information to fishermen every four hours.

Sea areas in the Firth, including Loch Long, Loch Fyne and Holy Loch, have been subdivided into sectors to implement the notification scheme. A navy spokesman said fishermen had been supplied with maps explaining the sectors.

The safety procedures were agreed between fishermen's representatives and the armed forces minister, Archie

Hamilton, after the nets of the trawler Antares were snagged by the hunter-killer submarine HMS Trenchant. The incident claimed the lives of the four-man crew of the Antares.

The secretary of the fishermen's association, Patrick Stewart, said yesterday it had been a rush to get everything in place and notify fishermen of the arrangements.

With only one more week of fishing before the break for the festive season, and the navy preparing to reduce submarine activities up to Christmas, the week would be a useful trial period and enable fine tuning of the safety measures to take place.

As part of the agreement with the fishermen, the navy last week began testing an electronic device, or pinger, which would alert a submerged submarine to a trawler's fishing gear.

A River-class minesweeper, HMS Ribble, a fleet tender and a submarine similar to the

Trenchant were used in the two-day trials to ensure the pinger's signal could be picked up at every angle. The results were being analysed, and while it was too early to know the outcome, it was understood the submarine picked up the signal five miles away, said a spokesman.

Meanwhile, the navy responded yesterday to allegations in the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper that four standing instructions were disregarded by the trainee commander-in-charge of the Trenchant at the time of the Antares incident.

The spokesman said of the article: "Unless *Scotland on Sunday* are running their own board of inquiry, I don't know how they have quite got it."

A naval board of inquiry would investigate if the regulations were breached, recommend ways of tightening them up if necessary and "start pointing the finger to recommend court martial or otherwise," said the spokesman.