

US navy denies submarine endangered trawlers

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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 gear 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 submariners 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 emphasised by Patrick Stewart, secretary of the Clyde Fishermen's Association. "If the submarine is correct when it says it was no closer than a mile, he would not have snagged the gear."

The depth of a net varied with its distance from the trawler; if the submarine had been on the surface, it would have had to have been within a quarter of a mile to have fouled it.

Local MPs were quick to demand that the code of conduct covering the Firth of Clyde, due to come into force on Monday, be extended to Britain's entire coastline.

However, the armed forces minister, Archie Hamilton, claimed it was "very unlikely" the US submarine was to blame for yesterday's incident. Safety row, Page 4