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# Michie says sub broke rules

By Eric McKenzie

A ROYAL Navy submarine has breached the 3,000 yard exclusion zone around fishing vessels operating in the Clyde, Ray Michie, the Liberal Democrat MP for Argyll and Bute, claimed yesterday.

Mrs Michie has written to a defence minister, Archie Hamilton, seeking a categorical assurance that the practice would stop.

Mrs Michie said that the incident, which she had been told involved a submarine diving within 300 yards of a fishing vessel, brought into disrepute an agreement by the Royal Navy to observe a 3,000 yard separation zone between submarines and fishing vessels.

The zone was implemented after the findings of Sheriff Principal Robert Hay, who presided over a fatal accident inquiry into the Antares tragedy.

Four men died when a nuclear submarine on a training exercise snagged the Carradale-registered Antares's nets and dragged her under as she was operating in the Arran Trench.

The recent incident, in which "... solemn undertakings were so easily broken" also undermined discussions between the Royal Navy and the fishermen.

"We must be able to guarantee that there can be no repetition of the Antares, and give fishermen the right to earn their living without fear from their own navy."

The latest incident happened in Mrs Michie's constituency. She wrote to the Defence Minister on behalf of the Labour MPs Norman Godman and George Foulkes, the honorary presidents of the Clyde Fishermen's Association.

The incident, which happened on 9 January, involved a deisel-powered submarine and several fishing vessels as they were operating in Loch Long.

A Royal Navy spokeswoman at Faslane said last night: "We have looked into the circumstances very carefully, and the complaint seems to have arisen as a result of a misunderstanding over the 3,000 yard separation requirements announced in the House by junior defence minister Kenneth Carlisle on 22 October.

"The minister said that 3,000 yards would be the new distance by which dived submarines should be separated from vessels which are fishing, navigation and shipping constraints permitting."

On the occasion in question, a distance of 3,000 yards between the submarine, which had not dived, and the fishing vessels had not been possible. The submarine's intentions, however, had been communicated to the fishing vessels.

The navy added: "The submarine had fishing vessels in view at all times, (the boat was at no time below periscope depth) and at no time were the fishing vessels in any danger."