

IAN RUTHERFORD



Military presence: the Vice-Admiral of the surface flotilla, Sir Nicholas Hill-Norton, on board the HMS Ark Royal during a visit to Edinburgh yesterday

# Navy chief hits at fishery protection plan

By Severin Carrell

PRIVATE companies bidding to take over the Royal Navy's fishery protection role would be unlikely to provide a service of better quality at a cheaper price, the head of the navy's surface fleet said yesterday.

Vice-Admiral Sir Nicholas Hill-Norton, a former commander of the fishery protection squadron at Rosyth naval base, said that he had great doubts over whether an

attempt by the Government to save money by employing a private company would really prove to be cost-effective.

Proposals to privatise fishery protection work, which could save the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries around £6 million, are currently being investigated by a cabinet committee as part of the Government's search for cost savings throughout Whitehall ministries.

A decision to contract out

the work would have potentially severe implications for Rosyth naval base, where 12 Royal Navy fishery protection vessels are based. With four Type 42 frigates already being withdrawn, the spectre of Rosyth's complete closure would be resurrected.

The vice-admiral, speaking on board HMS Ark Royal during a public relations visit to Edinburgh, said the navy's squadrons also provided protection for oil and gas rigs in the North Sea, a continuous

military presence around coastal waters, and extremely valuable training for RN officers as part of the same service.

Private companies would have to supply vessels, a support infra-structure, sophisticated communications systems and experienced officers. And, as part of the review, other ministries with a direct interest in the result, such as the Ministry of Defence and Department of

Energy, would have to be consulted.

They should discuss whether for "UK Limited, never mind fisheries or energy or navy, but nationally, what is it the United Kingdom wants. Do we want another organisation or just leave it to the navy...?"

"I think the navy gives an extremely good service [and] I personally would be surprised if the same quality of service could be replaced by another organisation."

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## TRAWLER NETTED MINE OFF COULPORT

A fishing boat crew netted a mine floating off Coulpport on Tuesday.

The crew immediately dropped the mine back overboard where it sank to the seabed.

A Clyde Submarine Base spokesman said: "Unsurprisingly the mine was dropped back overboard right away but unfortunately it sank too deep for our divers to take a look at it."

"We can't tell what kind of mine it is and will probably have to wait and see if it surfaces again to identify it."

An Ayr trawler also had a fishy catch when it netted a listening device lost from a Faslane submarine.

The crew of The Sardonian netted part of a towed array, which looks like a giant bobbin of thread, in the Firth of Clyde.

A Base tug picked the device up from the boat's captain on Tuesday.

A Base spokesman said: "We aren't sure how we lost the towed array but

from time to time they do hit rocks on the bottom as they are dragged along at the back of the submarine and break off."