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Demands for public inquiry into nuclear sub faults

THE DISCOVERY of a fault in the nuclear reactor of a Royal Navy submarine led to calls for a parliamentary statement and a public inquiry yesterday, coinciding with the revelation that, unusually, all five Valiant class submarines are in port.

The Navy denied vessels had been recalled from patrol to undergo inspections but defence experts said it was a "remarkable coincidence" that all five were in dock at the same time.

Labour's Navy spokesman, Roland Boyes, demanded a statement from the Defence Secretary, Tom King. "I am greatly concerned about the

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effect this defect might have had on the men," Mr Boyes said.

"I will be calling on Mr King to carry out immediate checks to ensure that the defects give rise to no contamination," he added.

The Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, claiming to have had two tip-offs about reactor problems on nuclear submarines, demanded a full public inquiry.

It should focus on what danger was posed to the public by the problem, how

much damage had already been done to the environment in the Irish Sea and the Clyde, and why the Ministry of Defence had "lied" when first asked about faults, the organisation said.

A spokesman, the Rev Adrian Rennie, said: "A public inquiry is essential. We have the right to know how much danger we are in and why the MoD has been misinforming the Scottish public."

The organisation claims that in the first tip-off, early last week, an anonymous

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'Another Chernobyl' claims phone caller

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telephone caller said there were cracks in the primary cooling system of the reactor.

The second, different, caller, on Monday of this week, said: "We are talking about another Chernobyl," before hanging up.

The MoD revealed on Tuesday night that all nuclear-powered submarines are to be checked after the discovery of a fault in one vessel's reactor. It is understood that this was discovered during a routine refit at Devonport Dockyard in

Plymouth. A ministry spokesman stressed yesterday that there was no danger to personnel working on the refit. He said: "The submarines are not unsafe. Safety is paramount."

Sources point to the fact that a visit to Southampton by HMS Trafalgar last Friday was cancelled for "operational reasons."

According to a Greenpeace report, HMS Valiant, the oldest of the class, suffered a hairline crack in the primary cooling system as long as 1981.