

# Sub safety plan delays criticised after near-miss

By Alan Dron

DELAYS in extending the Firth of Clyde submarine safety scheme to the rest of the west coast were decried by Scottish MPs yesterday, in the wake of yet another near-miss between a trawler and a submarine.

The crew on the Skye prawn boat Swn-y-mor reported yesterday that they were fishing in the Minch when they had to take evasive action to avoid being hit by a submarine travelling on the surface.

The incident happened on Monday afternoon, seven miles north-west of the island of Rona.

Archie Hamilton, the armed forces minister, told the Commons yesterday that the pilot project, set up to give notice of submarine operations after the loss of the trawler Antares and her four crew after her nets were apparently snagged by a submerged submarine last November, had to be evaluated before it could be extended.

However, he agreed there were no technical reasons why the consultation arrangements between the navy and

fishermen's organisations could not also cover other areas.

Calum Macdonald, Labour MP for the Western Isles, retorted: "There is no time for a pilot project. There have already been two incidents since the sinking of the Antares. Either could have had tragic results. The consultation arrangements must be extended immediately."

"I shall be making that point to the minister when I meet with him on Monday."

Charles Kennedy, Liberal Democrat MP for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, said he was extremely disappointed with the minister's "rather glib response," and would be writing urgently to him, urging an extension of the Clyde scheme.

Swn-y-mor's skipper, Dave Rollings, from Glenshiel, said he first saw the submarine on his radar when around two miles away in poor weather.

When it was about a half-mile away, he realised it was still heading towards him, and at a quarter-mile distance, he shouted to his nephew, Mike,

to let go the trawl so he could take evasive action.

"I knew that if I went astern we might get caught up in the trawl wires, so I went full ahead and the submarine passed our stern," he said. "We were pretty shattered after the incident. I thought it was curtains for us and said to myself, 'What a bloody way to go'."

Mr Rollings claimed the submarine had missed his boat by 30 to 40 yards. On contacting the navy torpedo range at Applecross, he was put in contact with the submarine commander, whom he said apologised.

The Ministry of Defence said yesterday it was investigating. "This was much closer than we would wish," said a spokesman.

However, the MoD insisted to Skye and Lochalsh Fishermen's Association that the submarine always had the trawler in sight and took action as soon as it became apparent a close pass was likely, eventually passing 80 to 100 yards away.