

# UNDERWATER THREAT TO FISHING FLEET

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**THE decision to extend Britain's territorial waters to 12 miles offshore could pose a serious threat to trawlers operating in the Irish Sea.**

Bernard Moffatt, general secretary of the Celtic League, monitors military activity in the area from his base on the Isle of Man.

He says the British move will force Warsaw Pact intelligence-gathering trawlers (AGIs) further from the shore,

so they will be unable to monitor submarine activity at Faslane and Holy Loch.

This, he adds, will lead the Soviets to send more submarines to the area to gather intelligence, endangering British and Irish fishing fleets.

"The area in question has already seen a considerable number of incidents involving submarines and surface craft," he says. "Now the situation seems set for escalation."

Until the extension of British waters on October 1 a spy-trawler sat perman-

ently at Mallin Head, at the northern end of the North Channel.

As access to this area is now denied to foreign vessels, the trawler has moved to an area west of Islay, and others have moved into the Irish Sea west of the Isle of Man, too far from UK bases to do their jobs properly.

Defence expert Malcolm Spaven of the Arms and Disarmament Unit at the University of Sussex, also believes the Russians will counter the British move by drafting more submarines into the area, though he says they could also bring in more sophisticated equipment which would enable

them to gather intelligence from positions farther out at sea.

In recent years concern has grown over the number of incidents involving fishing boats and submarines in the Irish Sea.

The families of the five men who went down with the Kirkcudbright-based trawler Mhari L in February 1985, believe the boat was sunk after an encounter with a submarine from the Holy Loch base.

The Celtic League are now campaigning for the whole of the Irish Sea to be demilitarised because of the threat to surface vessels.

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## Increased Soviet subs threat

THE possibility of increased military tension on the confined waters of the Irish and Celtic seas is heightened by the recent United Kingdom decision to expand its territorial waters to 12 miles the Celtic League claims.

The League also suggests there will be more Soviet submarine activity around the coasts of the Isle of Man.

The League, through its general secretary Bernie Moffatt, has issued a statement in which it claims the UK moves "obviously has much to do with UK military security as with territorial expansionism. The extensions to the limits in the North Irish Sea effectively block the Northern Channel to Soviet / Warsaw Pact AGI's intelligence gathering trawlers — similarly the permanent AGI presence off the North Irish Coast must move. There are two options for this movement North West — outside Skye, or down the Irish Sea to the West

of the Isle of Man.

"Either move is unlikely to be militarily advantageous as the AGI are unlikely to be able to fulfil their function in a position so far to West of Scotland, and the position off the Isle of Man is relatively restricted, also the ability of the UK to hinder the AGI's functions is considerably enhanced. Nonetheless, either or both options will be taken up.

"What the League is concerned about is that, to counter the NATO move and to enable it's intelligence gathering operation to continue, the Warsaw Pact will deploy more submarines to complement the role of the AGIs.

### INCIDENTS

"The area in question has seen a considerable number of recorded and suspected incidents involving submarines and surface craft, and the situ-

ation now seems set for an escalation.

"With steady expansion of Faslane / Holy Loch facilities, there is an obvious requirement in the UK's interest, to keep the Soviets at arm's length, and to this end, even now that AGI's are expelled from the Clyde approaches, the Royal Navy intends to monitor their movements. MHS Sentinel (a former deep-sea Oil-rig tender), is currently under refit to take over the job from HMS Wakeful, the Navy's most expensive 'tug,' which has been surreptitiously carrying on the role for years.

"The Soviets are unlikely to accept their enforced exclusion from the Clyde approaches, and indeed it is highly likely that undersea craft have already been deployed to 'fill the gap.'"

"In April 1982 there was an incident in which a suspected

Warsaw Pact submarine came too close to a NATO exercise in the North Channel. On that occasion, in international waters, there was nothing the Royal Navy could do: if it happens next month during exercise 'Purple Warrior' would the offender be depth-charged?

"If so, it could be embarrassing for the observers invited from Eastern Europe's military hierarchy, to view the exercise.

"This dangerous escalation has continued so long, it is past time enclosed seas like the Irish Sea (and indeed the Baltic) were demilitarized."