

Threat to submarine warning agreement

By IAN BRUCE
Defence Correspondent

THE Royal Navy was excluded yesterday from a policy meeting which is likely to result in an 80% cutback in warning broadcasts about submarine movements in and around the Clyde and is certain to renew fears over the safety of fishermen in inshore waters.

The Ministry of Defence is understood to be about to agree to a radical reduction in the four-hourly Subfacts scheme drawn up in 1990 after the accidental sinking of the Carradale trawler Antares by the RN submarine HMS Trenchant. Four fishermen died in the tragedy.

But neither Naval officers, who helped draft the new safety rules, nor representatives of the Clyde Fishermen's Association were invited to attend the meeting in Whitehall between officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport, the Government department responsible for the Coastguard Service. Commander Derek Ancona, the chief coastguard, insists that the safety broadcasts are taking up too much of his staff's time.

Embarrassingly for both departments, the meeting coincided with a United States Navy admission that one of its nuclear attack submarines had almost sunk a Northern Irish trawler in UK waters last September, largely as a result of not paying attention to the RN's safety guidelines.

A US spokesman admitted full liability for

the incident and agreed to pay more than £64,000 in compensation to the crew of the Kilkeel-registered trawler Lupina C.

He said the nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Sturgeon "did not operate in a prudent manner", and preparations for dealing with fishing vessels in the Irish Sea last September had been "insufficient".

The submarine's commanding officer and the officer of the deck on duty at the time have now been disciplined.

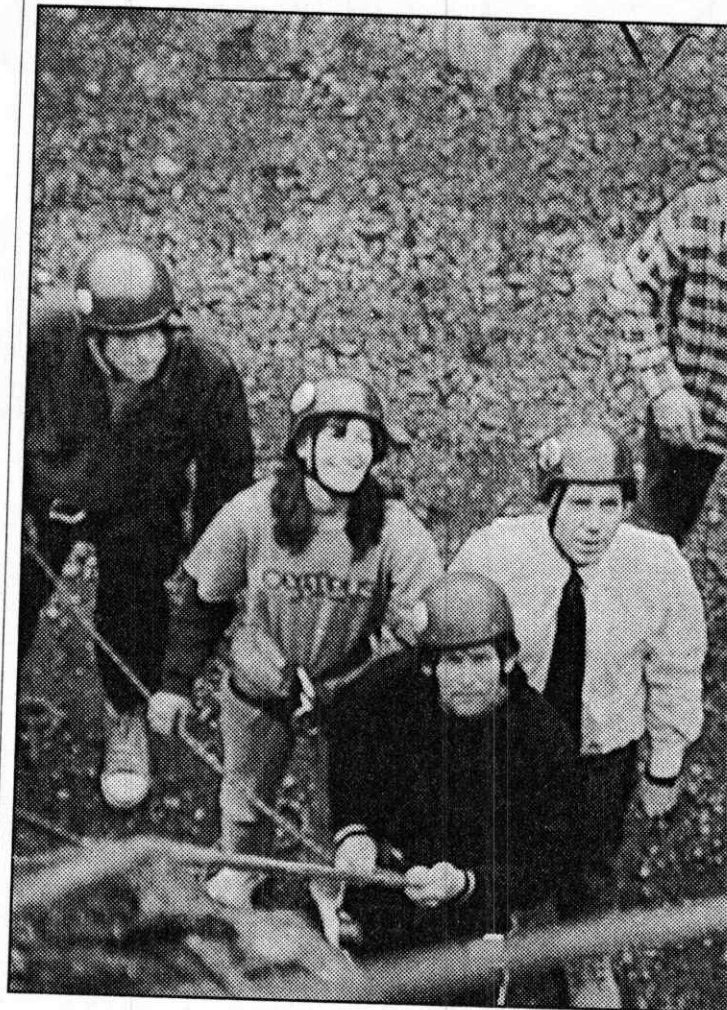
A naval source said last night that any move to slash Subfacts broadcasts was likely to undo much of the painstaking effort by the RN over the past two years to gain Scottish fishermen's trust and foster an atmosphere of co-operation to improve safety.

He said: "It appears that the decision will be taken by the men in pin-stripe suits rather than by the men in blue suits, the navy, who understand the problem and are anxious to establish a good and safe working relationship with fishermen."

An RN spokesman said later: "There is nothing wrong with the guidelines as they stand."

It is understood that a final meeting between the Government departments concerned will take place today. Both the RN and the fishermen insist that current broadcasts occupy only 18 minutes a day of the coastguards' time on average. Commander Ancona says relaying the information can occupy up to three hours a day and could interfere with search and rescue operations.

Minister puts his c



It may not be Everest, or even Ben Nevis, but Lord James Douglas-Hamilton when he went to Blackford Quarry in Edinburgh to watch a demonstration Fairbridge in Scotland. The Scottish Office is providing the charity, which

Ford upstages Rover with 'money-back' offer

By HUGH HUNSTON

FORD last night upstaged Rover by offering to refund or replace new cars and vans within 12 months of being bought and promising a similar exchange deal within 30 days, even if the only reason for returning the vehicle was a dislike of the colour.

Rover, which had planned to make its announcement next week, was left with a similar 30-day or 1000-mile "no strings" offer which applies from June 15, while Ford's deal is immediate and is backdated to car's

ed to make an unspecified "contribution".

Announcing the Ford offer, Mr Ian McAllister, chairman and managing director of the company's British operation, claimed it was the first guarantee of this type to be offered in Britain.

The refund or replacement deal emerged from a shortlist of seven consumer initiatives which in turn were selected from 40 separate initiatives. Ford emphasised that it would place the onus on the company and dealer to solve the problems or revert to the new deal.

In a recovering market, both