

Mouth of the Shannon poachers to look out!



The Bradan Beatha, commissioned some days ago for operations off the coast of Kerry and Clare, including the waters off the Shannon estuary.

The Spanish are coming; the Spanish are coming –

THE Naval Service maintains a very close watch on the waters off the Shannon Estuary and the seas generally between Galway and the south coast.

But will we be sly enough for the Spanish when they arrive here in flotillas – legally – next year?

The patrol work of the new South-Western Fisheries boat is, territorially, complimentary to the work of the Naval Service, with which it will liaise to provide a comprehensive service.

So Naval Service operations off the Shannon Estuary will still remain very relevant to the prosperity of fisheries and angling in the Limerick area.

The Naval Service has a number of fishery protection ships, all of which have done duty off the Shannon estuary over the years.

These include:

- four offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), and
- one ocean-going helicopter-carrying vessel...

all are built to commercial, not warship, standards, and all were constructed in

In other countries, such vessels are painted white and attached to the non-military Coast Guard services operated by such government departments as the Treasury or the case of the United States or the Revenue.

There are also two inshore guard ships of the Peacock class bought second-hand a few years ago from the Royal Navy at the time of the hand-over of coastguard duties in Hong Kong from

Britain to the local Colonial Council. The Minister for Defence who completed the purchase was Limerick's Michael Noonan, of Bruff.

They are again very much of the coastguard type. Their job as guard ships – the technical description given to them by the Royal Navy, as distinct from warships – was to guard the coast off Hong Kong from smuggling, fishery violations and just plain piracy – the law-enforcement rôle for which they were specially designed and built.

The Royal Navy had operated them on an "agency" basis for the Hong Kong authorities, which had a 75% interest in them, being responsible for police work. The British, being responsible for customs and excise, retained a 25% share, and also trained the personnel recruited in Hong Kong itself – these personnel were accommodated at a docksides hotel when not on sea patrols lasting longer than a day.

However, one drawback: their potential for conversion to warships is nil. Despite the fact that they were built to quality naval, not commercial, standards, there is neither the room nor the stability to take more weapons.

Specialised ships, such as these seven Irish Naval Service vessels, are regarded as the most economical means of law enforcement.

However, the oldest of the four offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), the Deirdre, was already in need of immediate replacement when it paid a farewell courtesy call to Limerick two years ago. A far cry from the navy's helicopter ship when it visited the Shannon Estuary

some years ago to take on board Minister for Defence Noonan, for an inspection cruise.

And there is still a grievous shortage of ships for full-time fishery protection alone. There is urgent need for further vessels, including a minimum of three more Offshore Patrol Vessels (one of them a replacement for the elderly Deirdre OPV), and at least two or three more fast vessels, like the Hong Kong ships, but hopefully bigger and therefore better suited to Atlantic conditions.

It is a long time now, since any combat vessels in the true sense, albeit second-hand, have been operated by the Naval Service.

The anti-submarine corvettes, now gone for decades, were of 1,250 tonnes – the minimum size for coastal operations. But they were such good sea-boats that they became the model for their replacements – the offshore patrol vessels (OPV's) mentioned above, also of 1,250 tonnes.

The navy's smaller mine warfare vessels were also scrapped years ago.

The government has, within the past few days, put in an urgent application to the EU for part-funding for more ships, so Limerick will be visited quite frequently by Irish Naval Service vessels, for PR purposes for encouraging recruitment.

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By PADDY MORONEY

POACHERS of the Shannon Estuary, and the waters off Kerry and Clare, had better watch out – there is a new "scout of the seas" on duty, and with the latest equipment.

It is a brand new high-powered fisheries patrol boat, the Bradan Beatha (salmon of life), run by the officers of the South-Western Regional Fisheries Board, and commissioned within the past few days at a cost of £482,000.

It is expected to visit Limerick shortly.

But there is more good news for the law-abiding in Limerick and the water downstream. There are indications that the salmon numbers off the south-west coast are already increasing significantly.

This means that the fish pass at Ardnacrusha will soon be recording large numbers going upstream through Limerick again to the extensive network of rivers and streams that make up the Shannon basin, effectively the whole centre of the country right up to the Border.

The speed of the new vessel is a closely-guarded secret, but it is very fast – the 53-foot all-weather boat is powered by two powerful engines of 850 horsepower.

The fisheries officers are leaving it up to poachers to work out one out in terms of how quickly they can be caught, but they regard such a guessing game as a first healthy exercise towards

becoming model citizens.

One other design feature of the vessel will make it particularly adept at catching poachers: it sits very low in the water, making it very difficult to spot, even on radar.

In short, the new boat will be on top of poachers before they know it. And even if they try to escape, after keeping a good lookout in broad daylight, there is no fishing vessel the new boat cannot catch in minutes.

The Department of the Marine reckon that they will be able to completely wipe out salmon poaching within a year or two.

The shallow-bottomed boat will also be able to patrol the shoreline, in addition to on-shore patrols.

The new boat is – despite its elegant interior mahogany-style decor, giving it an old-fashioned appearance – packed with the latest electronic gadgetry, including a particularly accurate radar, and a very accurate position-fixing system which can supply evidence of the position of poachers at sea, in relation to fishery boundaries – good for court hearings later on.

At present, there is another boat based in Limerick, the Bradan Feasa (salmon of knowledge), which is moored at Limerick docks.

The new vessel will be able to operate right out to the 12-mile limit, offshore, beyond which is the jurisdiction of the Naval Service, which is now being given new powers in relation to arrest – in the past it was necessary to have a garda on board a naval vessel to execute an arrest, but not any more under laws going through the Oireachtas.



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Flashback: the elderly Naval Service offshore patrol vessel, Deirdre, putting into Limerick for a formal farewell, two years ago – it had first visited the port on its maiden patrol over two decades previously, and was being relegated to dockside training.