

Coastal notes 8

Sleek, grey patrol ships have been a regular sight in Stonehaven Bay recently, prompting a few people to wonder at their official appearance and proximity to the shore. Although the vessels look like warships, they belong to the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, the body responsible for enforcing fishing legislation around our coast. Some of the Agency's work is done onshore, checking on fish landings and examining fishing gear at harbours, but they also patrol the seas and board fishing vessels to make sure they are operating within the law. Fishery protection vessels can be identified by the distinctive blue and yellow markings on their bows, these being the colours of the international code pennant for such vessels worldwide.

The Scottish protection fleet comprises four offshore vessels, smaller inshore patrol boats and several boarding craft, one or two of which are carried on the larger boats. As their name implies, they are used by fisheries inspectors to board fishing vessels at sea, sometimes in difficult conditions.

The boarding boats have recently had their petrol outboard engines replaced with inboard diesels and because this affects the handling of the boats, their crews have been undergoing refresher training at MRI in Stonehaven. The parent vessel remains safely away from the shore and a boarding craft is used to collect an instructor from Stonehaven harbour. After the day's exercises, the instructor is returned by boat to the harbour, a style of commuting which many people using the A90 might envy – until the weather breaks!

Alan Brown, Marine Superintendent at the SFPA, said “We have used MRI for this kind of training for a number of years. The recent refresher course has let us practice boat handling, pacing and manoeuvring, all of which are slightly different with the diesel engines now in our boats.”

The Search and Rescue team at Stonehaven trains weekly on Thursday nights, often doing similar exercises, as they have the capability to do ship to ship rescues as well as providing tows to boats in distress and helping those in trouble on the cliffs along our shoreline. Transferring a casualty from one boat to another is not undertaken lightly, but is often the only way an injured person can be quickly and safely brought to the shore. More commonly, the team practices boat handling, first aid and casualty rescue techniques, all of which are essential learning for a crew member.

For further information about MRI and the Search and Rescue team, call 01569 765768 or visit maritime-rescue-institute.org.