



Ready for trouble . . . NSW police launch the new Marine Operational Support Team on Sydney Harbour yesterday.

Picture: NATHAN EDWARDS

High security for US warships visit

By **RACHEL MORRIS**
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FIVE US warships will sail into Sydney Harbour amid unprecedented security on Friday on their way home from active service off Iraq.

With the heightened security and fears of anti-American protests, the fleet will be protected around the clock by the new NSW Marine Area Command.

NSW police have pledged there will not be a repeat of the embarrassing harbour scenes in April when anti-war protesters halted HMAS Sydney as it headed for

the war in Iraq. Two Marine Operational Support Teams (MOST) will patrol the harbour during the visit, which will bring with it 6500 US sailors, marines and other military personnel.

Part of the NSW Water Police, MOST will cover the retrieval of protesters from the water and crowd-control protection of VIPs.

One of the key aspects of their operation is the high-speed tactical launch driving, where highly trained members of the squad can board suspect vessels at speeds of 90km/h.

The squads use \$200,000 specially designed rigid-hulled in-

flatable boats which hold eight to 10 police officers. Police divers and the POLAIR helicopter also will be involved in the operations.

New laws about to come into effect will see special 200m "marine exclusion zones" around the US vessels.

NSW Deputy Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione said the new teams sent a "message" to would be protesters and saboteurs.

"People have a lawful right to protest," he said. "But this is about regulating protest activity in the water.

"We're as prepared as we can be for any protest activity."