

Commissioners Loyola De Palacio & Margot Wallstrom
Vice-President/Commissioner responsible for Transport & Environment Commissioner
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049

18th September 2003

Dear Commissioners,

The UK company Able UK intends to import and dispose of 13 ships from the US James River Reserve Fleet. These ships were built between 1945 and 1967. A United States Marine Administration document reveals that the quantity of oil remaining in the ships is over 500,000 gallons, and that a number of the ships to be imported have been classified as having a high risk of leaking. The contract for disposal highlights the risk of oil spills by requiring "an oil spill management company shall be retained during the vessel towing operations" and that at arrival in Teeside equipment must be available "in the event of oil discharging from the vessels". A number of these ships have already leaked, and the US Government has had to pay \$2 million to pump oil from the ships.

The towing across the Atlantic and to the UK clearly poses a risk to the seas and coastline. The company importing the ships into the UK has said that the ships will pass through the Channel and travel through Irish, French, Belgian and British waters.

The dry dock where the ships are to be dismantled has yet to receive planning permission. The planning authority has twice delayed making a decision on whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is needed and what scope it should have. In addition, there is a dispute over whether the company can store the ships at the site where the dry dock is due to be built without additional planning permission. The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency is likely to make its decision on whether the ships are in a fit state to enter British waters in the week beginning 22 September 2003.

We would be grateful for an urgent response as to what investigations the Commission has carried out into the potential risk from the transportation through European waters of the 13 ships to the UK in the light of the Erika I and II and Prestige legislative packages?

Furthermore, what assessment has the Commission carried out into the proposed import and disposal of the 13 ships by the UK with regard to complying with the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive for the construction of a dry dock and its potential to impact on legally protected wildlife sites under EU law?

We look forward to your prompt attention of this issue. We will also be seeking to raise this very important issue in the RETT and ENVI Committees.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Lucas
Green Party MEP for South East England