

Mr Gavin Devine
Clerk to the Committee
The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
7 Millbank
London
SW1P 3JA

12th November 2003

Dear Mr Devine,

I am writing to urge the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee to undertake an urgent inquiry into the handling by the Secretary of State for the Environment of the importation of toxic ships from the so called "ghost fleet".

My reason for calling for an Inquiry is that I alerted the Secretary of State by fax (and post) on the 9th October 2003, two days after the first ships departed from the United States, that Able UK did not have the appropriate planning permission and therefore Community law would be breached. However, no action was taken by the UK government for a number of weeks with the result that, as I understand it, the UK taxpayer will have to foot the bill for wintering the two ships which will arrive today and tomorrow before they are returned to the US.

I believe that an Inquiry should be conducted to determine whether UK taxpayers will now have to pay for the ships that have arrived to be sheltered over winter before being returned to the USA simply as a result of incompetence by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Not only that, it is quite absurd that the UK government allowed these ships to depart for the United Kingdom given that Able UK had not received the planning permission necessary as required by EU law. Given that the Secretary of State for the Environment became aware on 9th October that EU law would be breached she should have intervened immediately with the Environment Agency and demanded that the ships be turned around.

It would be pertinent for the Committee, should it decide to launch an Inquiry, to examine the following points:

- Why did the Secretary of State not order the immediate return of the ships on 9th October when she became aware that no facilities were available to dismantle the ships in the UK in compliance with Community environmental law?
- Why did the Environment Agency allow the first four ships to leave the US before all the necessary permissions were in place?
- Why did the Environment Agency not declare that their licences were invalid before 31 October 2003, given that the Secretary of State for the Environment was informed that their licences were invalid on 9th October 2003?
- How long did it take the Secretary of State to raise her concerns with the Environment Agency once she became aware that the dismantling of these ships could not possibly be done in line with Community environmental legislation?
- Why did the US authorities not order the return of the ships when requested to do so by the UK Government?

I look forward to the consideration by the Committtee and for your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Lucas