

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0943/08
by Gerardo Galeote (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: The sinking of the New Flame

The scrap metal ship New Flame has been stranded on a reef half a mile offshore at Algeciras (Cadiz) and Gibraltar since 12 August 2007, after a collision with an oil tanker. The vessel's prow was damaged, leading to the flooding of the hold, which left the vessel half-sunk. Over the last seven months, various specialised salvage companies have attempted to re-float the ship, without success.

Throughout this time, the vessel has been leaking fuel, and these leaks have increased in the last few days due to the bad weather conditions, which has led to the vessel's sinking almost completely.

Apart from the oil slicks which have been reaching the various beaches in the area, there is the far from negligible question of the environmental impact of the 42 000 tonnes of scrap the vessel is carrying.

1. Does the Commission endorse the decision of the Titan Salvage company on 10 February – the day on which the New Flame sank further, increasing the amount of oil leaking from her – to withdraw two boats which were supporting the New Flame, leaving only one tug in place, given the imminent worsening of weather conditions?
2. Does the Commission not think that priority could have been given to salvaging the potentially environmentally-harmful cargo, before proceeding to try to re-float the vessel?
3. Does the Commission not think that offloading the scrap could have made it easier to re-float the vessel, and then to proceed to drain its tanks and break it up?