

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3066/03
by Alain Esclopé (EDD)
to the Commission

Subject: Breaking-up of decommissioned US warships

The United States has decided to have hundreds of decommissioned US Navy warships, which are riddled with asbestos and contaminated with fuel oil, broken up in a port on the east coast of England. The towing of the ships to that port is exposing neighbouring national and international waters to serious environmental risks.

The logical course of action would have been for the ships to be broken up on US territory, rather than thousands of kilometres from their home port.

Pressure from US ecologists, combined with the financial incentives on offer, prompted the Americans to pass on the task of dealing with this ecological hazard to European countries which have already been badly affected by similar problems in recent years.

Against a background of world, and, more particularly, European, efforts to foster sustainable development, is it not strange that such practices should go unremarked?

It should be borne in mind that the Americans have adopted maritime legislation which authorises them to use military force to exclude vessels which pose an environmental risk from their territorial waters.

This story has demonstrated once again how easily safety issues are outweighed by financial considerations.

Does the Commission intend to take unilateral steps to remind the United States of its responsibilities, rather than simply allowing the countries concerned to act on their own account?