Marine pollution: disused offshore oil and gas installations, removal

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Concern at derogations permitting the disposal at sea of large off-shore oil and gas installations, once they have reached the end of their working life, was voiced by the Committee in a resolution adopted unanimously. The result, it noted, could be marine pollution, including low-activity radioactivity from some of the materials discarded. The resolution, contained in a report drafted by Françoise GROSSETÊTE (EPP,F), said that derogations should only be granted where the alternative of dismantling an installation for disposal on land might endanger workers or damage the environment. It notes that the cost of dismantling is generally limited compared with the revenue earned when the installation is operative. Such cost should, in any case, be taken account of in the operator's investment plans in accordance with the polluter-pays principle. The derogations, particularly for large steel installations, are permitted under a decision adopted last July at an international marine environment conference in Sintra, Portugal. However, the committee was pleased that -albeit subject to these derogations - the decision, in principle, banned the dumping of disused installations at sea. It welcomed the fact that reuse, recycling or final disposal on land represented the preferred option. There are currently some 600 offshore installations in European waters, with the UK and Norway particularly involved. Public concern has been heightened since the UK Government allowed Shell to dump the Brent Spar oil storage buoy in the North Atlantic in 1995.