

Greenpeace

The Canadian owned vessel Greenpeace III and French naval ships have been involved in two separate incidents over the past year and a half within the zone de sécurité around Mururoa Atoll. In June 1972, the Greenpeace III was in collision with a French naval vessel on the high seas beyond French territorial waters. In August, 1973 French seamen boarded the Greenpeace III, subdued its crew and sequestered it in Mururoa itself.

Greenpeace III (1972)

This matter is a complex one, both in law and as to the facts. Mr. McTaggart, the owner and skipper, alleges that his boat, the Greenpeace III, was rammed by a French naval vessel and that this was due to the fault of the French. On the other hand, the French authorities have since stated that the collision was due to Mr. McTaggart's fault and they have denied responsibility for it. The fact that the incident occurred on the high seas, beyond any national jurisdiction, and that it took place within an area of the high seas that the French had announced was to be closed because of nuclear testing activities, has created additional legal complications, both in terms of domestic and international law.

The Canadian authorities had been made aware of Mr. McTaggart's trip to the zone before his departure from New Zealand and we have been in almost constant contact with him or with his lawyers since the accident.

As to the background of the 1972 incident, in brief, Mr. McTaggart a Canadian citizen, is the owner of a sailing ship, the Greenpeace III, formerly Vega, which (because of its small size) was not registered here in Canada or in New Zealand, where the vessel was normally kept. Mr. McTaggart left New Zealand in the Greenpeace III at the end of April 1972, having stated his intention to sail into the French nuclear testing area