

A rare piece of honesty – but bad news

When you are running a very long term campaign, it is surprising where the breaks come from, no more so than this written question from Liberal Democrat Alistair Carmichael, MP for Orkney and Shetland.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: [135549] *To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on what date the 1964 London Fisheries convention will cease to apply to the UK; and from that date all EU fishing vessels will be excluded from the UK's 6 to 12 nautical miles zone.*

George Eustice (Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food): *The 1964 London Fisheries Convention will cease to apply to the UK on 2 July 2019. During the implementation period, current access arrangements will continue, including access to the 6 to 12 nautical miles zone where permitted under current EU rules. After 2020, we will decide who can access our waters and on what terms. Any decisions about giving access to vessels from the EU, and other coastal states, to our waters will then be a matter for negotiation.*

To give George Eustice his due, it was an honest answer although not what our fishing industry wants to hear. There is, however, more to his answer than appears at first sight.

The UK Government gave two years notice at the beginning of July 2017 to leave the London 1964 Fisheries Convention (which gave certain EU Member States the rights to fish in our 6 to 12 nautical mile zone).

At that period of time, only 3 months into the two years period from invoking Article 50, the government thought that this slight overlap did not matter as we would be coming out of the EU, including the CFP, taking full control of the nation's marine resource on 30 March 2019.

Because the Government, through wasting so much time, has

ended up having to go cap in hand to the EU Commission for extra time, at the first demand from the EU, they surrendered their trump card – fishing. The date of so called exit is now 1st. January 2021

It is not just fishing. For 21 months, unless the government changes course, much of the running of the UK will be handed to the EU. The importance of Mr Carmichael's question is that the answer clearly shows that the decision to surrender rests entirely with the UK Government, not with the electorate nor the opposition, nor even the EU.

The only other country to leave the EU (then EEC). has been Greenland. I remember it well. While we cannot draw too many parallels, it was noticeable then that Greenland's negotiators took a bashing from their Brussels counterparts, but they knew their ground, stood firm, told the EEC to get their vessels out of Greenland waters and ended up with an excellent trade deal. What a contrast from our team! What an unbelievable mess they have made. Greenland understood what control of their fishing waters meant and how important it was. Here in the UK, "control" will essential mean "EU control" as our spineless team of ministers allows Brussels to make all the running.