

FFL: Government's Fisheries Bill deserves a cautious welcome

CIB affiliate member Fishing for Leave gives a cautious welcome to the launch of the Government's Fisheries Bill, but warns that the serious threat to the fishing industry from Theresa May's Chequers proposals remains.

The launch of the Government's Fisheries Bill by DEFRA secretary of state Michael Gove deserves a cautious welcome.

The government's announcement said:

'The Fisheries Bill will enable the UK to control who may fish in our waters and on what terms... The Bill also gives the UK the power to implement new deals negotiated with the EU and with other coastal states and manage fisheries more effectively and sustainably in future.'

At its heart the Bill seeks to deliver the following:

- Controlling access – by ending current automatic rights for EU vessels to fish in UK waters.
- Setting fishing opportunities – by proposing powers to ensure that the UK can set its own fishing quota and days at sea.
- Protecting the marine environment – by ensuring fisheries management decisions are taken for the benefit of the whole marine environment

Many who have fought for 25 years to escape the disastrous CFP thought we would never see this day.

We never thought we would see legislation which would allow Britain to take back control of our waters, £6-8bn of our resources, and decide access and management for our own

national benefit – as Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands do.

That is hugely welcome, but it is the devil in the detail which we fear. As the government admits, this bill is subject to the wider negotiations.

Negotiations where – disgustingly – Theresa May proposes to re-obey the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) after Brexit with an ever-extending ‘transition period’ and a Chequers plan that will see the UK obey a so-called ‘common rule book’ – probably forever.

The fishing industry and Fishing for Leave have warned that, with much of the industry already struggling, continuing CFP policy for the transition would finish many off.

The transition would allow the EU to enforce detrimental rules to cull the UK fleet. This would allow the EU to use Article 62.2 of UNCLOS to claim Britain’s ‘surplus’ resources that a shrunken British fleet would not have the capacity to catch.

The Fisheries Bill may set in place the legislative ability for Britain to independently take back control, but it doesn’t look like happening soon – which is disastrous.

We also reiterate our grave concern and continue to lambast the failed proposal to address discarding of fish above quota limits whilst keeping the fundamentally flawed quota system that causes the discards.

The government proposes using our repatriated resources to give extra fishing allowances to vessels, so they have enough quota for all species and therefore will not need to discard.

However, this extra will not be allowed to be profited from – it must be landed for free.

All this will do is perpetuate a race-to-fish. Vessels will have to catch more and more to find what they can profit from.

Instead of discarding, they will have to land mountains of fish for free.

We have told DEFRA that this will fail spectacularly. Sadly our advice seems to have fallen on deaf ears.