

Fisheries: One MP talks sense as battle over quotas continues

A week ago today, the subject of fisheries was raised by Craig Mackinley, the Conservative MP for Thanet South, in the debate over the European Union (withdrawal) Bill.

The relevant part of his speech, taken from Hansard, was as follows:-

"I support it {The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill} completely for legislation that is applicable only to the United Kingdom, but when dealing with legislation that involves relationships outside the United Kingdom, such as the common fisheries policy, I have a few concerns, because the body of legislation—the acquis—that is the CFP is made up almost entirely of regulations. The only way we can achieve compatibility is through a legally binding withdrawal agreement, and that in itself brings some problems. First, at this stage, we do not know what that agreement will contain. Indeed, we do not even know if we will be getting an agreement at all, such has been the appalling behaviour, sadly, of our EU partners.

Secondly, taking the common fisheries policy as an example, article 50 takes us out cleanly, so there is no possibility of future legal challenges that we would have to try to avoid. Regulation 1380/2013, which will be brought across by the Bill, will re-establish the common fisheries policy in all but name, possibly paving the way for a legal challenge, perhaps via the Vienna convention on international treaties, through the withdrawal agreement. The evidence of that is the acquis that we have accepted and transposed into UK law, thereby creating a continuation of rights thereon.

I would like to see the proposed fisheries Bill, which is due before us at some stage, and which could solve the problem. We have no idea what that Bill will contain. Will it continue to give away the nation's wealth that is its fish? Will it continue the disastrous CFP policy of quota allocation, which puts the resource in the hands of a few, and is the cause of the completely immoral discarding of prime fish that we have seen all these years? We simply do not know. Why are we going down this tortuous route when the easiest route would be to exempt the entire fisheries acquis from the withdrawal Bill, and produce a fisheries Bill, coming into force on 30 March 2019, that confirmed what international law bestows on this nation? That is not unusual, because the withdrawal Bill already exempts parts of the charter of fundamental rights.

Fishing is the area in which the British people demand a clean Brexit, and I think they will accept nothing less. Fishing must not be used as part of a trade-off, and availability must not form part of a deal elsewhere. Control of our exclusive economic zone extending to 200 nautical miles or the median line will regenerate our coastal communities, but if we follow current fisheries policy, we will certainly fail to do that. It is quite odd that we commit vast amounts of cash to communities such as mine in Ramsgate, Broadstairs and parts of Margate through the coastal communities fund—I am thankful that we do—but we seem to have no clear commitment to the one thing that could provide great rejuvenation for our coastal communities, which are recognised as having lower rates of employment, and which are in need of restructuring and infrastructure.

On this subject, the electorate are very wary of shenanigans. We cannot afford to create failure, and it is our responsibility to make this a success. I am happy to trust the Government by supporting Second Reading tonight, but I would very much like to hear more about their proposals for restoring one of this nation's finest treasures—our very

positive fishing grounds, which have the potential to benefit our communities and should never have been taken away.”

It is encouraging that at least one MP has spoken so clearly about the key issues as far as fisheries are concerned. There is much vested interest, particularly among those who have bought quota, to keep the status quo. This, as Mr Mackinley rightly points out, will do no good whatsoever to our coastal communities and especially the smaller family-owned fishing boats which may struggle to survive 2018 if the new discards ban is enforced.