

Fisheries Part 10 – the policy priorities for an independent UK

A resource such as the marine life – fish, shellfish, and mammals in the 200 nautical mile/median line zone – belongs to the UK, not to Westminster parliamentarians. They are, however, responsible for how it is administered. Furthermore, fishermen are not the owners either, but custodians and what is more, this national resource belongs to everyone, people who live inland as much as those who live on the coast.

Parliament has not been a good administrator of this resource. Firstly, since 1973, it has been progressively given away and secondly, it placed a monetary value on what we were given back. Neither of these things should have happened.

Brexit provides an opportunity for our present Westminster Parliament to make amends for their predecessors' failings and look after our nation's resource properly. Incidentally, this means among other things that MPs must not devolve the 12 to 200 nautical mile zone out to the Scottish Parliament, as their First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon wants to give it away again, thus repeating the same mistakes as the last 44 years.

What should be the guiding principles for shaping a fisheries policy for an independent UK? In order of importance, I think they should be:-

Social: A nation's resource should be a benefit for ordinary people. Currently, the marine environment only benefits a few select individuals. Fish prices are too high, but without a radical re-think on fisheries policy, no guarantee can be given that market forces will bring prices down. On the other hand, ending the quota system and ensuring that different types of fishing can take place could facilitate the return of

small family fishing businesses, which would not only rejuvenate coastal communities but could help bring prices down.

Environmental: An environment that is well-managed is essential for a long-term rejuvenation of the fishing industry. This, of course, goes hand-in-hand with the social concerns mentioned above. Conservation issues need not be at odds with the need of small businesses to earn a living. Sometimes areas do need to be closed for fishing for a short term, for instance when juvenile fish are abundant. Also, consideration needs to be given to fish-eating animals such as seals who are perfectly entitled to compete with fishermen for fish stocks, but whose numbers need to be monitored.

Economic: The above two principles, if adhered to, will bring economic benefits which will not be concentrated in the hands of a few powerful people. By contrast, putting the principle of maximum financial gain first – especially if accompanied by a free-for-all mentality – would be very short-termist as it would encourage overfishing and thus not be sustainable.

On 17th. November 2016 The New Economics Foundation launched its *Blue New Deal*, a 20-point action plan to revitalise the UK coast, under the heading 160,000 new jobs for Britain's coasts. Of the 20 points, only 3 points (15 to 17) related to Fisheries and 3 more (18 to 20) to Aquaculture.

This think tank, which claims to develop alternative economic policies with a strong social and environmental flavour, sadly missed the mark in a number of areas. True, some of these 20 points were correct, such as Point 16, which said, "*Smaller boats are the lifeblood of thriving ports – those that are fishing sustainably need to get a larger share of fishing opportunities*" but other points betrayed a complete lack of understanding of the potential for a rejuvenation of fisheries in the UK. For example,

Points 1 to 3 covered "Put local people in control", but what is the point of this until there is something for them to control?

Points 4 to 6 covered "Plans for coastal change" but how can anything change for our coastal communities unless you also argue for repealing all fisheries legislation relating to the CFP?

Points 7 to 11 covered "Invest(ing) in a coastal transformation", but in this part of the work, there was no mention of fisheries, which ought to be the leading topic as far as coastal transformation is concerned.

Mind you, think tanks are not alone in their muddled approach to fisheries. Some briefing papers, issued from the House of Commons on 27th. July 2016 are no better.

The author/s wrote "*The implication of Brexit for fisheries are highly uncertain*". Not at all. If the exit procedure as outlined by the Prime Minister on 2nd. October 2016 is followed, there is no uncertainty, it is very clear. They then went on to say that "*The implications will depend on future negotiations with the EU and future UK Government policy.*" While it is true that the responsibility for negotiation lies with our MPs, the Brexit default of no agreement would give us complete control of our Exclusive Economic Zone. We are in a strong position, so it is up to the EU to negotiate with us.

The report then goes on to list the "*Possible implications, based on the views of different stakeholders and evidence from existing non-EU European countries*" which may include:

- *The UK obtaining exclusive national fishing rights up to 200 miles from the coast. However, the UK may trade-off some of these rights in order to obtain access to the EU's sea area or access to the EU market for fisheries products;*"

This shows muddled thinking. We don't need to "obtain" anything. There are no "ifs or buts" about whether the UK has exclusive fishing within its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). On Brexit, it will have. End of story.

- *Impacts on the UK's ability to negotiate favourable fish quotas for UK fishers with the EU. It is not possible to say whether the UK will be more or less able to obtain satisfactory quotas for fishers;*

This is totally the wrong way round. The EU has no rights in the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone. To fish in our waters, the EU has to negotiate with us.

- *The need for a new mechanism to enable the UK to negotiate and agree annual fishing quotas with the EU and other countries;*

This is already covered by the third United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Seas (UNCLOS III) .

- *The introduction of a UK fisheries management and enforcement system. This in many respects may mirror the existing arrangements for managing fisheries, albeit with additional resources required;*

To mirror the existing arrangements – in other words, a shadow CFP – would be a disaster and unacceptable situation.

- *Restrictions on EU market access for fishery products (depending on the outcome of negotiations) and less influence in discussions on determining EU market rules for fish;*

This is a negative attitude. It appears that the author believes that the UK owes the EU some share of our resource.

- *Less certainty around public funding of support for fishing communities or environmental sustainability.*

Funding is much less important as an issue than having genuine control

- *Issues related to possible changes to the protection of the marine environment*

Considering the appalling performance of the CFP, such a remark is an insult.

In conclusion, these briefing papers miss the one crucial point: – Brexit means the competency over our EEZ comes back to Westminster. The EU has no input into how we manage our EEZ, nor any rights. Our Civil Service needs to understand that Brexit means we are no longer beholden to the EU. As far as fisheries is concerned, we are now in charge – a situation which the younger generation has not experienced.

Having explained why some current thinking about fisheries is mistaken, this then poses the question as to what should be included in a future fisheries policy to maximise the tremendous potential out there.

Firstly, as we mentioned above, it would bring huge social benefits. A successful fishing industry will include a mixture of small, medium and large vessels. The revival of the small family-run fishing businesses would be without doubt the quickest way to rejuvenate the coastal communities. These would operate in the inshore sector – in other words, within 12 nautical miles of the shoreline.

A thriving port/harbour where small fishing boats come and go on a daily basis, creates an interesting spectacle for tourists. Furthermore, the mixed catch will often find a ready market in local hotels and restaurants. Although some towns like Hastings in Sussex still retain a fleet of small fishing boats, many other towns which were once home to a small fleet of, say, 10 or 20 fishing boats now have none. Worse still, some coastal communities such as Peterhead whose economy was once dominated by fishing, have become desolate as the

principal form of employment has been destroyed. Brexit brings with it the prospect of rejuvenation of such towns and the creation of new jobs. Whole areas will start to improve.

Besides commercial fishing, Brexit also brings better prospects for recreational fishing. Once money begins to flow into a given area, economic recovery will gather pace as it spreads out into other sectors.

Only someone who has fished in the waters around the UK can appreciate the enormous potential out there. Our coastal communities could have a very exciting future, but first, authoritative voices who really understand the sector must rise to the difficult task of convincing those who are in a position to bring about this success story that it really is possible.