

Fisheries Part 3 – There must be no attempt to create a Mark 2 CFP on independence

Many of my fisheries articles have looked back at previous events, but if HMG produces the correct policy, we can finally start to look forward.

In the last article, we pointed out how the Treaties shall cease to apply, taking the Regulations with them. Regulation 170/83 started the EU quota, based on tonnage per species, including the distribution keys to the various Member States, known as relative stability. This cancerous Regulation has now been superseded by another equally dreadful one – Regulation 1380./2013.

The EU's quota system, like the CFP as a whole, was nothing more than a political tool designed to speed up the drive towards integration. Given that it is widely acknowledged to have been an environmental and economic disaster, it may seem incredible that, with the prospect of an escape from this project now on the horizon, some people are lobbying for the UK to create a sort of Mark 2 CFP on independence, allowing EU vessels the same or slightly less access to British waters as present. Such an outcome would not be Brexit and would continue to be an environmental disaster.

Any sort of shadow CFP must be opposed because the quota system is so unworkable. It has ended up criminalising all EU fishermen, as they have all had to cheat in order to survive. The cheating goes back a long way. It began with falsifying records of how much of which species were caught and where.

Misreporting the species of fish which were being caught and the area in which a given boat was fishing resulted in wrong scientific data and an inaccurate basis on which to determine

future quota.

Then there are the unauthorised, so called "black fish" landings. If fishermen have exceeded their quota, they either have to land fish surreptitiously or throw them back in the sea. The authorities have long recognised there is a problem with the CFP, but their attempts to close the loopholes by tightening regulation has only made matters worse. The latest controversy has been the introduction of an unworkable discard ban which, in practise, has not stopped the destruction of thousands of tons of marketable fish. No one knows exactly how much is still being discarded.

It is possible to design gear to separate species, although not to the level necessary fully to prevent discarding. At least this gear does ensure that what is deliberately allowed to escape survives. However, the discard regulations are so complex that not even the fisheries officers are fully conversant with how the rules apply in different areas.

When you are given a quota by weight per species, you end up destroying other species in the process of trying to catch those final few fish, while at the same time prolonging fishing time. For the unique mixed fishing environment found in UK waters, home to approximately 30 different species of fish, you could not have devised a more destructive method of managing fisheries than the discard regulations included in the CFP.

I was the first person to highlight discarding, back in 1988, when I used to write a fortnightly column in the fishing press. Now, 28 years on, we now have a discard ban which looks good on paper, but it is still happening out at sea thanks to the unworkable EU system of quota. I made the discard calculations then on the basis of what I had seen myself when working on board a number of trawlers. Unfortunately, the EU's current discard rules were written by people who are committed to pursuing an integrationist agenda and who have never been

out at sea or understood the difficulties which fishermen are facing.

Of course, an independent UK will need some sort of fisheries management system and we will look at this in more detail in part 4, but it would be crazy to copy a system which is rotten in the core – one that never has, and never will, work in our mixed fishery. Unfortunately, pressure is being applied to do just this – to roll over and give the British people's resource away again. There are far too many people talking about just negotiating a share of our own resource – in other words, allowing a sort of CFP to continue with the rest of the resource being shared out among the present EU members. To start discussions on that basis is capitulation.

Why is anyone supporting anything even remotely resembling the CFP? Simply because some within the Industry want to keep the status quo in the aftermath of Brexit in order to protect their interests. They have invested millions of pounds in purchasing quota, turning quota into a saleable commodity, for which, if the CFP were to be scrapped, they would have no legal entitlement. With a certain bank having invested heavily in purchasing quota, it and other beneficiaries are creating a great deal of pressure for the UK to create a sort of Mark 2 CFP on independence, allowing EU vessels the same or slightly less access to British waters as present.

Let us be clear on this:- such pressures must be resisted and a policy of procrastination is perfectly sufficient. Our negotiators need only sit the two years out, do absolutely nothing and wait. As proven by the Kent Kirk case, which we considered in the previous article, if there is no agreement by the end of the two-year period stipulated under Article 50, fisheries reverts to national control. In other words, it becomes our national resource and the other EU countries will have no quota whatsoever unless we offer it to them. Once our negotiators appreciate how strong a hand this deals us, it will be the EU that will be desperate to negotiate with us,

not the other way round.

In a future article, I will list the tonnage and value of the catch which EU vessels currently take out of British waters without giving us anything in return. I will also show how much of this freebie we provide them is then sold back to us. The figures will come as something of a shock.

It is ironic that one of the objectives of the EU project was to create a sense of unity among the peoples of European. The CFP has had the opposite effect, causing resentment and nationalism. It would be great to get back to the earlier situation when fishermen were seaman first and foremost, and nationality didn't matter, but then to understand this camaraderie, you have to have spent time out there at sea, something most EU officials would never dream of doing.