Fisheries Part 4 – Why we should copy the Faroese fisheries management system model

It is vital that the opportunities Brexit offers for our fisheries are exploited to the full. In my last piece, I pointed out that we should avoid any attempt to create a shadow Common Fisheries Policy. With the treaties no longer applying once the Article 50 negotiations are concluded, the Regulations which govern EU fishing policy will therefore cease to apply as well. This means that fisheries reverts to national control. In other words, the other EU countries will have no quota whatsoever unless we offer it to them.

In this article, I want to address another important issue. It is vital that we adopt the best practises from those countries who control their own fishing. Professor Philip Booth of the Institute or Economic Affairs recently produced a paper advocating the Icelandic model of fisheries management. I would strongly advise against such a policy. There is a much better model for us to emulate which is closer to home – the Faroese. Advocates of the Icelandic model, like Professor Booth fail understand the complexities of a mixed fishery in the relatively shallow water around the UK. Our fisheries are unique. Iceland's waters do not contain as many different species as ours. Only the waters around the Faroe Islands, which share the effect of the Gulf Stream with us, are compatible.

Another reason for avoiding the Icelandic Model is that, like the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, it operates a quota system

of weight per species per vessel. Norway is similar. By contrast, the Faroese system determines allocation by the number of days at sea. This is a much better system for a number of reasons which I will set out below.

1). The problem of discarding marketable species.

Discarding, whether at sea or to landfill, is immoral. However, with the Icelandic system, unless you can give every vessel a proportion of quota for every species, which is impossible, there will be discarding in one form or another. Even if you could come up with a complete quota system for every vessel and every species, inevitably one quota will run out before others. Of course, officialdom will try to devise ever more complicated ways to prevent discarding, but it is like a dog chasing its tail. It is unworkable.

By contrast, with the Faroese system, there is nothing to discard apart from a few undersized fish. Everything is sold and marketed

2) The effects on Fishermen's attitudes.

In Iceland as much as the EU, whatever the authorities do to stop discarding, it is impossible in a quota-based system, even though it can appear solved on paper. In a mixed fishery, there is no way to avoid hauling up the wrong species for which a vessel may have no quota or have used it up. What do you do ? There are three choices, all unsatisfactory.

i) Keep them and sell them illegally.

ii) open the cod-end and let them go dead and dying back into the sea.

iii) Land them and incur a cost

A quota system puts pressure on fishermen to cheat if they are to survive.

Under the Faroese “Days at sea” system, everything you catch can be landed to be sold without fear of prosecution.

3) The need to report the catch

Fishermen play a key part in building up scientific data. They are required to report how many of each species they catch and where they were fishing when they caught them.

The quota system, which encourages cheating and discards, will inevitably result in falsified scientific data. After all, if you end up catching species for which you have no quota, it is human nature only to record to fish which you are entitled to catch. Likewise, if you catch a species that you have quota for, but caught them in an area you are not allowed. you will steam to the area where you are allowed and say you caught them there, which screws up scientific data.

Faroese fishermen, by contrast, have no fear of criminalisation. They have no reason to be dishonest and therefore record true data.

4) Fishing effort.

As was noted under 1) above, with a quota system, a given vessel will inevitably use up its quota for one species quicker than for others. In a mixed fishery, this means that when your quota for one or more species has been used up, a percentage of your catch cannot be sold – at least legally. This means lower profitability and more fishing time, along with increased pressure on fishing grounds.

A “days at sea” system means that you can fish without looking over your shoulder. There is one downside. The limit on the amount of time spent at sea means that fishing off the harbour entrance needs to be discouraged. However, with this caveat, the “days at sea” system is much more efficient as overall actual fishing time is reduced compared with the quota system.

5) Relationships between fishermen, scientists and fishery officers.

A quota system results in constant battles and lack of trust. Co-operations between the different groups is minimal as everyone is trying to outwit everyone else. By contrast, all three groups can work in harmony under a “days at sea” system.

6) Individual fishermen’s ability.

If fishermen are given a set allocation of weight per species, it gives little incentive to be innovative, progressive, or to improve. The “days at sea” system gives far more scope for fishermen to excel, benefitting from their own endeavours and maximising profit.

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Given the overwhelmingly advantages of the “days at sea” system, let us now have a closer look at how the Faroese make it work.

- The harvesting licence is an operating licence issued to an individual vessel. The fishing licence specifies the details of fishing activities (catch and geographical area limitations) in which the vessel is permitted to participate, as well as gear requirements, requirements for reporting of catch data and information on landings or transshipments.
- All vessels larger than 15 GT must maintain a daily log of their activities in an authorised catch logbook which is issued for this purpose, recording data for each set or haul and they must also have functioning satellite vessel monitoring systems (VMS) in both national and international waters.
- We are constantly being told that because of straddling stocks, an independent UK must run a parallel system to the EU, The tiny Faroe Islands, however, has no problem

in deciding what is best for its own fishermen and those who are allowed to fish in its waters. Faroese fisheries in other zones and in international waters have long been an important part of total Faroese fisheries catches, both in terms of total tonnage and economic value.

- Faroese fishermen have a long tradition of fishing in foreign and international waters. The Faroe Islands have reciprocal fisheries agreements with neighbouring countries in the North Atlantic region – the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Greenland. These involve the exchange of fishing opportunities, including offering foreign vessels quotas and access to the Faroes' zone in exchange for equal fishing opportunities for the Faroese fleet in their zones. These agreements provide Faroese fishing vessels with the scope and flexibility they need.
- A number of fish stocks of great importance for the Faroese fishing fleet can therefore be fished both in the Faroese fisheries zone and in the zones of other countries and international waters. Managing and conserving these fish stocks is therefore a shared responsibility requiring close international cooperation between all relevant nations in the region.

The Faroe Islands have no resources other than the marine resources, yet they, a tiny nation of only 50,000 people, have been brave enough to introduce one of the most successful fisheries management systems currently in operation. Will we have the courage to break out of the quota mindset and follow their example?