

Fishing protests a success – and this is only the start

Organisers Fishing for Leave welcomed the success of last Sunday's demonstrations and thanked the hard work of members and the public for their support.

FFL says it is now important that the politicians pay heed to not only the fishermen but the thousands of people who turned out to support on the quaysides or this would just be the start.

Yet Mrs May said in Denmark that she wanted "fair and reciprocal" access to waters for the countries' fishermen after Brexit.

Mrs May's definition of 'fair and reciprocal' fishing access is probably as far away from the rest of the population as her idea of Brexit meaning Brexit. Access should only be on a needs must equal swap basis.

Sadly it seems Mrs May's idea is the same as that of her predecessor Edward Heath. That Britain's greatest natural resource and coastal communities are expendable negotiating capital as her capitulation to trapping Britain's fishing in transition shows.

Theresa May needs to stop playing semantics and for once live up to her rhetoric of 'let me be clear' by having the decency to stop playing with real people's lives, futures and businesses in coastal communities.

She must reverse the capitulation on fishing and categorically promise that we will be entirely free of the Common Fisheries Policy come March 2019. If not, she will consign another British industry to museum and memory as the EU culls what is left in the 21 months of the transition period.

PROTEST A HUGE EFFORT THAT'S JUST A POLITE START

All those from the industry who made the effort to turn out around the coast did a fantastic job and should be massively proud to represent and fight for their industry, communities and way of life. That is what this is all about for us. Milford Haven, Portsmouth and Hastings were all phenomenal efforts with excellent turnouts from along the coast. A "well done" must go to Weymouth for coming together at such short notice as well as Newcastle, where a "well done" is due to many North Shields fishermen who rose to the occasion on short notice.

Special mention must go to Plymouth for the sheer numbers and the artillery battery of fireworks launched and to Whitstable where Chris and Luke's symbolic burning of a boat was a show stopper finale that deservedly won top trumps.

To see so many younger folk at sea showed that this is an industry that has green shoots if they are given a chance to be nurtured. We'd like to convey a big thanks to all those who worked like Trojans to make this happen and the thousands of members of the public that came down to support the flotillas, ultimately our seas and fish stocks are the nation's resource and as much theirs as anyone else's. Some people even travelled to Plymouth from as far as Stoke-on-Trent!

These were peaceful protests conducted with black humour and high professionalism – even when Remainers chained themselves to the boat Thereason May that was about to be symbolically burnt.

However, these events weren't a party but a full-blown protest. We're sick to death of being malevolently and dismissively portrayed as being justifiably expendable when we are anything but. Fishing is a primary wealth generating industry providing food security and employment in ancillary industries in rural coastal areas.

Repatriating our fishing grounds and the 60% of the fish the EU catches in them is worth a potential £6-8bn every year to coastal and rural communities and can create tens of thousands of jobs.

For the remainers gleefully peddling the deliberate narrative that fishing doesn't matter, we ask – how much is your job worth to the economy? Something that the professional students who berated fishermen, claiming that remainers knew best about fishing in Whitstable should consider.

TRANSITION MEANS MORE BOATS WILL BE BURNT

The transition isn't just 21 months to suck up but an existential threat and potential death sentence for what's left of Britain's fishing industry.

DEFRA's peddling the government line about "delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit" along with "safeguarding fishing communities" is laughable given obeying all EU law after Brexit means the EU is able to enforce detrimental policies to cull our fleet.

The EU has every incentive to do this as under international law, UNCLOS Article 62.2, if a nation is unable to catch all its resources it must give the surplus it can't catch to its neighbour – the EU.

Our big fear is the ill-founded EU discard ban is to be fully enforced as of 2019. The EU's inept quota system forces fishermen to discard half their catch to try find fish their quota lets them keep.

The ban addresses the discard symptom not the cause – quota. Vessels must stop fishing when they exhaust their smallest quota. These 'choke species quotas' will see the fleet tied up, boats and businesses at sea and ashore go bust.

The 12 mile limit that protects our inshore fishermen and

nursery grounds can also be abolished upon withdrawal.

Despite DEFRA's pathetic official protestations that "the UK's share of catch could not be reduced over the transition period", the EU commission has sole discretion to award and change resource shares and has every reason to do so – to our detriment.

DEFRA's statement that we will be ok because we 'are working in good faith' is pitiful given the EU has repeatedly said that a departing member must be seen to suffer.

We would love to know how DEFRA squares the bunkum that "by December 2020 we will be negotiating fishing opportunities as an independent coastal state" given obeying all EU law doesn't end until 2021 with international fishing negotiations not agreed until that Autumn?

To sacrifice tens of thousands and communities to appease a few ideologically pro-EU vested interests is a second betrayal that would have dire electoral consequences for coastal MPs

Now coastal MPs must listen to the thousands who turned up at short notice and the many more members of the public who support this totemic industry or we will go up a gear or two. In other words, last Sunday will just be a polite start.

It is important that MPs in coastal constituencies remember they serve their constituents who elect them and not a dismissive chief whip. If MPs have any inkling of self-preservation they must heed what we are saying and put country before party. They must stand by and remember: "No deal is better than a bad deal" and that coastal constituencies count.

WELCOME MPs SUPPORT BUT MUST BE ACTION TO BACK WORDS

We welcome the statements of support from Owen Paterson, John Redwood, Sheryll Murray, Derek Thomas and Luke Pollard but are hugely disappointed that all the other MPs that were invited

to show their support weren't in attendance.

The politicians have now been told clearly that the transition is unacceptable – and why. It's now time they honoured the vote and walked away from the transitional terms as it is clear the EU, in order to dissuade other countries from leaving, is not prepared to offer a leaving member a deal worth more than a packet of smarties.

If they do not change tack and shovel fishing away in desperation for any deal, they will be guilty of a conscious second betrayal of thousands of lives, businesses and coastal communities and will be culled in those constituencies in the same way our fleet will be.

Fishermen are not going to take being thrown to the wolves lying down and these protests will just be the start if patriotism, decency and good sense do not prevail.