

We have less than five months to prevent the annihilation of our fishing fleet

*The EU's Common Fisheries Policy has decimated our fishing fleet. We have less than five months to save it from total annihilation, writes CIB Deputy Chairman **Philip Foster**.*

When Heath betrayed British fishermen as a condition (among many) of joining the EEC, very few at the time noticed what was being done. The EEC had managed, just a few weeks before Heath signed up, to extract a new clause about fishing waters from the Treaty of Rome. But because, in order to disguise this theft, Heath had negotiated a derogation of ten years, this duplicity went unremarked upon.

Some forty years on, and after some thirty years of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), we see the British fishing fleet decimated, coastal towns in steep decline, and the seas around Britain – now EU rather than British waters – severely over-fished. Worse, those scientists charged with monitoring the state of the fisheries are unable to do so as they have no reliable data about fish stocks. Why? Because of the CFP.

As is now well known, the CFP involved quotas of catch. If a fisherman caught more than his quota, the excess was simply dumped overboard to rot in the sea. Hence only data about what was actually landed reached the scientists – useless information because of the unknown quantity of discards.

But, you may well say, when we leave we get our waters back, so all this can be reversed.

Once again our duplicitous politicians are betraying us. During the two year 'transition period' after 29 March 2019 our fishing fleets will be exterminated.

There is to be a new CFP in 2019. This appears to reverse the previous CFP which, as has finally dawned on Brussels, involved huge discards of millions of tons of good fish. So what have these paragons of intelligence come up with? The new CFP will ban discards!

Sounds good? Er, no. On the new system, quotas remain as before, but now, if you catch your quota of any one species, you must return to port, because were you to carry on, you might catch more of that species which would have to be discarded – which is now forbidden.

This will be ruinous to any fishing company in the UK where our quotas are small anyway. Suppose you have quotas for say, (and I write as a landsman!) haddock, cod, herring and mackerel. Once you have your quota of any one (your 'choke' species), you must return to port.

If the UK starts this policy, which it must during the two year 'transition', then our fishing fleet will be bankrupted in six months. We will be left with no fleet at all.

Then comes the final twist of the knife. Once we have no fleet, Clause 62.2 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) comes into effect. This, in effect, says that if a nation does not have the capacity to catch all its available resources it must give the surplus to its neighbours.

So if the EU can destroy our fleet in the 'transition period', then they've every reason to use this article to claim what we can no longer catch. There will be no going back in the foreseeable future.

Talk to or write to your MP, and spell out this disaster coming down the track. Sadly, too few MPs understand that fish doesn't come from supermarkets, but from the sea.

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For further information, see our booklet *Seizing the Moment* by John Ashworth, and visit our affiliate member Fishing for Leave.

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