

# One step nearer...

It's good to have some good news on the Brexit front after hearing of the hardening of the EU's stance on the proposed transitional arrangement and the recent but unnecessary talk of a second referendum. Last night, something positive happened which takes us one small step nearer to leaving the EU – the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons and will now go to the Lords.

Recently, the focus of Brexit has been on our future relationship with the EU once we leave. There is another equally important aspect of leaving the EU – ensuring that we have sufficient laws in place to enable the country to run smoothly on Brexit day. Essentially, all laws passed by the EU which have then been included on our statute books derive their authority from the EU treaties, but these will cease to apply once we leave the EU and repeal the 1972 Accession treaty, so the resultant legislation also becomes null and void.

In order to avoid a legal vacuum, with no regulation at all covering areas of day to day life, laws originating with the EU must be “repatriated” so that they derive their authority from our Westminster Parliament instead and this is what the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill provides a framework for. They will not necessarily be transposed verbatim. Last year, we highlighted the problems with so doing using one particularly obnoxious law – the Fisheries Regulation 1380/2013 – as an example.

The debate over the Bill has centred on the scale of the task in ensuring all this legislation works for an independent UK. Labour has been concerned that the Government may try to twist the necessary re-wording of some directive and regulations for its own political advantage, bypassing Parliament in the process – commonly referred to by the media as the “Henry VIII

powers". However, all the proposed amendments were defeated (See here)

What is more, not a single Conservative MP voted against the bill. Even Ken Clarke and Anna Soubry trooped into the "Aye" lobby! Four Labour MPs – Kate Hoey, John Mann, Graham Stringer and Frank Field (along with the suspended Kelvin Hopkins), rebelled against the party whip to support the government which ended up with a majority of 29. They deserve our thanks. A further eight Labour MPs did not vote either way. A full list of how MPs voted can be found here.

For the benefit of anyone not familiar with Parliamentary procedure, bills normally pass through three readings before coming into law. The final reading has now been completed. The predominantly Europhile House of Lords may try their hands with further amendments, but some of their number have thankfully acknowledged that it is not appropriate for an unelected body to try to mess up the democratic will of the people. There may, perhaps, be a bit of further Parliamentary ping-pong with any Lords' amendment, but essentially, we are one step nearer leaving the EU as very little now stands in the way of one vital piece of the Brexit jigsaw finally being put in its place.