

The Common Fisheries Policy part 6: The public swallowed the propaganda

Our British political representatives continually assured everyone things would be okay for British fishermen, with the huge Spanish fishing fleet becoming into the “community fleet”. They gave assurances that all would be well when the first ten-year derogation ran out, just as they did in the 1970s and just as is presently happening regarding the forthcoming derogation termination in 2022.

These same people had a problem:- knowing full well that the execution of British fishermen had to take place, but having to do it without the British people knowing.

Looking back in hindsight, we, the fishing Industry, provided the answer for them.

In the second half of the 1980s, and into the 1990s two situations were happening: large amounts of juvenile fish were being dumped dead back into the sea, and the sand eel stocks, which play a crucial role in the food chain, were being hammered.

The industry highlighted these problems, and through some brilliant research by the Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen, groundbreaking information was provided on how, by changes of the gear design, the small fish would not be caught.

Our own Ministry firstly denied either of the events were taking place then secondly went into silent mode, appearing to want to take no action. At that time we did not appreciate why.

One area where the EU excels is if they have a problem,

sometimes a crisis ensues which they can use to solve the problem and at the same time further the integration process. This is called a beneficial crisis.

Here, we had unwittingly solved their problem. By allowing the slaughter of juvenile fish to continue, encouraging the wiping out of the sand eel stock by issuing massive uncatchable quotas, what will happen is that fish stocks will plummet. Exactly the same thing had happened in Norway a few years previously, so they knew it was going to happen.

The next thing was that the cry of "too many vessels chasing too few fish" was heard. Various means of encouragement were given to British fishermen to get out – decommissioning, and giving or selling our quota to Spain and everyone in the UK thought this was to safeguard the environment. On the contrary, I maintain this was a deliberate act to bring about the treaty obligations without anyone in the UK realising the trickery and deception that had taken place. It was a very convenient beneficial crisis that came at the right time. It was concealed within the claim that too many vessels chasing too few fish without the British public knowing the skullduggery and real reason why fish stocks were plummeting.

The mass destruction of the British fleet took place and the British people thought it was all about conservation. The EU, ably assisted by our own Ministry, had won a great propaganda coup, Spain has been integrated as per her rights as part of the community fleet in community waters. The concept of national fleets and national waters were being eradicated and the public were none the wiser. Mission accomplished.

This depiction of events will, of course, be denied, but it is not strange that once the British fleet was scrapped, the sand eel situation was acknowledged, other measures were introduced, and stocks started to improve? All accomplished by the British against the British. This is why I call it evil. How otherwise could you have got rid of the British fleet

without a public outcry if stocks had been healthy?

Three decades ago, the divers of the Marine Laboratory, had made themselves a simple but very effective underwater vehicle which was towed and which allowed them to observe the escape behavioural pattern of certain species. This opened up the possibility of designing selective fishing gear. For example Haddock, on trying to escape, go upwards and backwards, cod go downwards and try and escape underneath, so you can start to design fishing gear with escape panels. Once again, it was typical that much of this work was commenced by the British but never advanced because it was not in the interest of EU Treaties where politics of integration come first. Our bright ideas were then developed further by other countries.

Where the escape areas were noted, panels of different mesh shape and size can be inserted. This was blocked during the process of the British fleet's destruction, but is now happening. If you look at fish netting, it is what we call diamond mesh. When you pull the strain across two opposite points of the diamond mesh it works in a scissor action which makes the whole trawl very strong and flexible. For escaping round fish this can be a problem. The fish, by pushing into the mesh, opens it, wriggles though. The mesh then closes just as the fish flick its tail to get away, taking scales off the tail area where it then gets an infection and in turns dies. Therefore the area of escape, a window of square mesh is inserted, but because this mesh is a lot weaker and distorts easily, it has to be specially made. Unlike diamond mesh, the escape opening size stays constant.

This is a start, but not the full solution. In Canada they have had good success with grids set at an angle inside the narrow end of the trawl.

It is possible to design fishing gear to take the species and size you require, leaving everything intact alive at the sea bed. It is no good carrying out separation near the sea

surface, because with fish that have swim bladders, being hauled up through the pressure zones ruptures their bladder.

Even through very slow progress is being made within the CFP and regionalisation is becoming a possibility, there are far too many serious flaws within the system for it to be ever a success. Common European Union policies are political; they are cumbersome, bureaucratic, one-policy-fits-all, a rigid structure, slow to respond, and above all to create full integration.

Marine life simply doesn't respond to that system. In the sea, life is fast, furious, and cruel. Those supporters of the CFP repeatedly claim that "you need a CFP because fish know no boundaries". True they don't, but they have other boundaries. It is not rocket science. Marine life revolves around the environment; water temperature is critical. Squid, for example, will move for half a degree temperature change. The food chain is a must. Down in the sea, everything gobbles up everything else up. It is a vicious world down there. What is so important is to look after the base of the pyramid of life. If the base is destroyed, as happened with sand-eels, you can't expect much at the top.

So different species will move for food and temperature. Thirty years ago there was a huge outcry about "overfishing" when the cod left the Grand Banks, Newfoundland. It was not overfishing. The water became too cold and the cod moved eastwards across the North Atlantic, and as the cod were no longer on the Banks, eating up other species, the amount of crab and shrimp multiplied dramatically.

So if you are trying to control fisherman, as they are presently, restricting them to a given area, in a given time frame, for a given species, of a given quantity, you are in deep trouble, and you end up destroying more than you market.

Because, unlike agriculture which has fences, keeping farm

animals where you want them, in the sea, excluding fish farming, the wild marine stock are free to go where they please. As one species move out another moves in. Presently you might have quota for one, not the other. Result, discarding marketable fish.

It is not just the commercial fisherman that has to be considered, but also the huge potential of recreational fisherman.

So the drive for a Common Policy, destroys the environment, jobs and communities. It is a disaster and it is not creating a united European people, but the very opposite – Nationalism. How do you think the residents of Peterhead feel, when after being Britain's premier fishing port 20 years ago, has become desolate with empty shops and a harbour with hardly any Scottish vessels, and yet money is being spent to deepen the harbour to accommodate Spanish and French vessels as a transit point?

In part 7 we look at the FleXcit plan for Fisheries.