

The Common Fisheries Policy

Part 8: Can we believe anything?

One theme that runs through the UK's 43-year involvement with the EEC/EU is that our politicians – supported by the Civil Servants – have done everything in their power to keep the UK locked into the Common Fisheries Policy and indeed, to the EU as a whole. There have been constant assurances and promises everything was being done for UK fishermen and the future was guaranteed to be better. There were glowing expectations of what reform would bring.

Yet the opposite has happened. These empty promises merely kept the UK locked into a system which progressively strangled our industry and the fishing communities. Constantly a light of hope and change for the better appeared to be shining at the end of the long tunnel but as you got nearer, the light disappeared further away into another tunnel so as to continue the flow of implementing integration – as commanded in the Treaties – often by stealth. An EU Common policy has one destination, a Union fishing fleet in Union waters.

Fisheries provides a true life and particularly graphic example of what our own people have done and will do to betray their own. But for what? This question has never been answered. We are currently watching the same picture unfolding with Prime Minister Cameron's renegotiation package. It will be presented as a light at the end of the tunnel – the final solution that will enable the UK to be in Europe but not run by Europe. "Come with me and I will give you back your country", says Mr. Cameron. Oh really??

Just to recap what the salient features of the Common Fisheries Policy actually are:-

Equal access: All waters of the member states, up to the shore (base) line is shared equally with every other member state. Apart from during the early 1970s, you never heard the equal access principle mentioned, even though it was created at the very start of the Common Fisheries project – as far back as 1970.

To a common resource: All living marine life is a common resource.

Without discrimination: One of the main principles of the EU membership which our Prime Minister does not want to understand.

Without increasing fishing effort: So if a new member has large capacity and little resource, that capacity has to be absorbed with no increase in catching more which means someone has to go.

On January 1st 1973, Britain, Ireland and Denmark joined the EEC, and in their terms of membership was a 10-year derogation (an exemption from equal access) for the coastal state to retain the 6 mile and partial 6 to 12 mile limit. This concession was more valuable to Britain than any other member state.

The first derogation ran out on 31st December 1982, and a new derogation was put in place, once again of 10 years' duration, from the 1st January 1983 to 31st. December 1992, and thereafter every 10 years, the present one expiring 31st December 2022. We are constantly told Britain is at the forefront of fisheries regulation. Oh yes! We are briefly when the threat of losing the derogation for the 6 and partial 6-12 limits hangs over us, but this is not exactly a strong negotiating position.

The Fisheries Minister for 1982/3 was Peter Walker, who called that session "The CFP". You will often find officials stating the CFP started in 1983, but it didn't. It was merely another derogation from the CFP. He also stated "*the Commission made an unequivocal statement as to the right and obligation of all*

member States, in the unique circumstances of fisheries, to protect this vital resource, and the Commissioner stated that this would apply to all of the proposals on conservation, access and quotas."

Of course they would say that; it was an obligation written into our Accession Treaty. Walker went on to say: *"No concessions of any description will be made by the United Kingdom Government that affect the United Kingdom fishing industry."* He had obviously taken no notice of other part of our Accession Treaty, yet a month later in January 1983 he stated: *"The reality is that if the United Kingdom, instead of demanding anything like the historic proportion of Europe's fish that it had caught, demanded a 200-mile limit and 50 per cent. or 60 per cent. of Europe's fish, that would mean the massive destruction of the fishing industries of most of our friends and partners in western Europe."*

Is that why we joined the EU? To sacrifice our fishermen and indeed our country on the altar of the EU?

Ten years later, when the 1992/3 agreement was being negotiated, the then Fisheries Minister David Curry stated that, *"The measures form a package that secures the industry's future and that of the fishermen. The policy is based on conservation and common sense."* What conservation? Answer: the conservation of too many vessels chasing too few fish. Hardly "common sense" as the term is normally understood!

At the same time Sir Hector Munro, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, *"I go to Brussels next week; we shall do our best to help the fishing industry in the United Kingdom. Fishermen must understand our difficulty and understand that we cannot concede more fish than conservation will permit"*.

Precisely so. We are tied by the Treaties which our own people don't acknowledge, but everything is building up to use the beneficial crises of conservation to get rid of the British

fleet.

On to 2002/3 and another period called “reform of the CFP”. Alun Michael, the Minister for Rural Affairs stated that *“One of the Government’s aims for reform of the common fisheries policy is the encouragement of sustainable fishing. UK and EU funding is available to encourage fishermen to adopt selective catching methods.”* By now it was a bit late to save the British fleet. Encouraging the use of selective gear should have been started 15 years previously, but the mission of integration had to come first.

The 2012/3 period was called the “New CFP”. Admittedly every 10 years the package gets bigger and more complicated, but the management regulation still contains equal access and the time-limited derogation for the 6- and partial 6 to 12-mile limit. This means on the 31st. December 2022 the whole Fisheries management regulation falls, and the whole negotiation starts again.

One thing that did change in this so called “New CFP” – one word, Community waters/vessels became Union waters/vessels. This was another small step to the eventual final destination to total integration.

So December 2022 will be another battle of pretence. Our Ministers will go to their masters in Brussels and argue for British fishermen, who are really Union fishermen. Meanwhile the only “British waters” are so limited that the fishing of those waters has now been relegated to a cottage industry which only exists thanks to a derogation within the 6 and partial 6 to 12 mile limits, which the other EU member states are under no obligation to renew.

Or perhaps it may not be like this. We could end this farce once and for all by voting to leave the EU. Indeed, if we do so, by 2022 we could instead be showing the world how, as free people we can manage the marine life to the benefit of mankind

and the environment, rather than the driver of politics of subservient people.

CONCLUSION

The whole purpose of writing these articles is not just to expose the scandal of the CFP but to point out where the blame really lies. Firstly, look at the deception of that frequently-used word "reform." Anyone using that word must be challenged:- What is actually being reformed and how? As far as the CFP is concerned, the answer is very little. The treaties constrain the scope for reform to little more than tinkering at the edges. Secondly if our government ministers, aided by Whitehall, can be so duplicitous and treacherous in this one area of fisheries, can we really assume that their behaviour with regards the EU has been totally honest in every other area?