

The Common Fisheries Policy part 7: Flexcit: Our fisheries' future.

One cannot expect to cross examine Prime Minister David Cameron on the issues on which he intends to campaign to stay in the EU if the leavers can't explain what will replace EU membership. Hence the reason for Flexcit, which contains a lengthy section on Fisheries – from page 267 to 280. Dr. Richard North and Owen Paterson MP had already produced a green paper on the subject of Fisheries and this has now been incorporated into Flexcit

Anyone who campaigns in the forthcoming EU referendum, for the “leave” side, cannot just say that Parliament must repeal the European Communities 1972 Act, and hope for the best. That is not good enough. There has to be an orderly and amicable separation, which is not going to be easy. After 43years of integration, it is going to be a major challenge. However, as far as fisheries are concerned, it is no good scrapping one régime in order to establish another equally bad system. Withdrawal presents us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to show what can be achieved in an area that contains one of the finest marine resources in the world.

The North/Paterson green paper, now part of the overall Fisheries Flexcit plan, is excellent. It is the most exciting prospect for marine management, and for someone like myself who has worked on fishing vessels in many parts of the world, and has been heavily involved in conservation, I know the potential is staggering.

As far as the UK is concerned, the fundamental principle on which a policy should rest is that the fish and other sea creatures within the UK's fishing zone of 200 mile/median line

are the property of the nation as a whole. Custody of that resource lies with the central and devolved governments.

The first priority, therefore, is that control/competence is returned back to Britain. The overall Fishing Industry, while appearing as one, is made of several different groups, often opposing each other. The Industry is as divided now as it was in 1972 when the British Trawler Federation supported the "equal access" principle because they mistakenly thought they would gain access to Norwegian and Icelandic waters.

An inshore industry could be built around the 0 -12 mile limit, which would have a beneficial effect on coastal communities through tourism, recreational fishing, employment and other ancillary industries. All could be administered locally. The offshore Industry would be based on the 12 to 200 mile/median line, and then you have the straddling stocks and reciprocal arrangements, which brings genuine friendship between fishermen of different nations. When other nation's vessels fish in our waters they would do so under our rules.

Devolved Fisheries Management Authorities (known as FMAs) could be set up. There would be two types: inshore (As far out as the 12 mile limit); and offshore (from 12 to 200 miles or up to the median line). Each would have a small executive board, responsible for policy-making, a consultative council and an executive arm responsible for administration. There would also be an agency, responsible for monitoring and carrying out enforcement action. Members would be appointed independently of the Secretary of State, and inshore boards would be appointed by the local authorities in the relevant maritime areas.

FleXcit's fisheries proposals are based on the concept of "Days at Sea". The advantage of this is that there is no reason to cheat. If you are a good fisherman, you will do well whereas a poor fisherman will not survive.

By contrast, the CFP is based on the political tool of quota – it has to be because of the integration process and equal access principle. It encourages cheating and dumping of non-quota catches either on shore or at sea. It is a rigid system trying to impose its will on a fluid and rapidly changing conditions.

Two essential features are needed for a viable fisheries policy. The first is the ability to be able rapidly to close areas down where juvenile fish are abundant. This has to be done within hours, even if the closure period may only last for a day or two. This ability to react quickly will never happen while our waters are under the control of Brussels control. The other important feature of any contemporary fisheries management is the use of selective gear, As a fishing gear designer I need to emphasise that the gear you design for one area is not the same for another area. Even if you are catching the same species, you need to make slight alterations to the gear. This level of adaption is impossible under the policy imposed by Brussels where one set of rules must fit the whole of a large area.

You must have fishermen on side to make this work, but again, under the North/Paterson proposals, this is far more likely than under the current EU- controlled regime. The attitude it has engendered is that if I don't catch it, some other foreigner, even though it is another EU citizen, will get it, so I will get in first.

With selective gear, as long as the Minimum Landing Size (i.e., below which you are not allowed to sell) is above the breeding size, you can't overfish, because you are culling the top of the pyramid. If there are no fish of that size, the fisherman will have no catch to sell, and will go out of business, but that is market forces at work, not overfishing.

Personally, I am strongly in favour of the model used by the Faeroe Islanders which operates in a diametrically opposite way to the EU system of setting for each species a total

allowable catch on an annual basis, often based on dubious research. In my view it is no good working from the top of the pyramid downwards. Research should be directed at the base of the pyramid upwards; starting with the food source. Once you know the availability here, you can calculate what can be sustained at the top. If for example you have a collapse of the base, you have to fish the top hard, the very opposite to what would happen now.

To explain what I mean, this would be like a situation where a famine is taking place somewhere in the world and another million people are sent to that area to live there. If you don't have the flexibility to enable fishermen to catch more adult fish, they will simply eat their young. This is exactly what happened in Norway when they destroyed their sand-eel stock. The adults took longer to grow and the fish that survived ate their young, destroying the next generation.. Sometimes one species will increase dramatically, and they have to be fished harder to restore the balance. You can only do this with a system as proposed under Flexcit, not the rigidity of Brussels.

Another area that is totally unfair is that fishermen have come under criminal law, which puts them on a par with drug dealers, thugs and thieves. This is not the way to get maximum co-operation out of those who harvest the sea, for which any successful fisheries régime requires maximum data being collected from the fishing industry. The best penalty for offences is to dock days at sea, and if the operator continues to offend, to take their fishing license away.

Leaving the EU *per se* is no solution in itself. It is only the beginning. Every badly-designed EU policy will require individual replacement with something better. And fisheries provided a useful example of exactly how a bad policy can be replaced by something better. Largely self-contained in policy terms, it makes an excellent test bed for policy development as well as illustrating the complexity of the repatriation

process.

There is no question that it poses a challenge but at the same time the opportunity to do far better – to harvest nature's gift free of political interference – cannot be ignored. Ranged against us are those who don't want the Nation State, and those reformists who either don't understand the workings of the EU, or else who have a hidden agenda. If they really believed in reform, they would want to get rid of the principle of equal access to a common resource without discrimination. However, such reform is impossible because of the thinking behind the EU Common fisheries policy, which is incapable of beneficial reform along the lines suggested here as it violates the very principles of integration enshrined in the EU treaties which it was designed to promote. Unfortunately, so-called reformists never acknowledge this harsh reality.