

The Fisheries white paper – Where the Government has got it wrong.

The Fisheries White Paper was better than I was expecting and certainly a lot of thought has gone into the wording, but – and there is always a but – the whole paper has been written on the assumption that there will be an implementation/transitional period, which is far from guaranteed.

I was also surprised to see in the Executive Summary the following two statements:

1) We do not yet know the outcome of the UK's negotiations to withdraw from the EU or on a future economic partnership.

2) Access to markets for fisheries products will be agreed as part of our future economic partnership, just as with other goods and food products. This is separate to the question of fishing opportunities and access to waters, which consequently will be addressed separately, founded on the UK's legal status as an independent coastal state.

Those two statements by DEFRA are an honest assessment firstly because the withdrawal agreement which includes the implementation period, is not complete, so whatever the White Paper proposes, there is no guarantee that will happen, especially given we are a long way from securing any sort of trade deal. Secondly, we know full well that the EU will demand present levels of access into UK waters as part of a trade deal. Having sacrificed fishing during the Implementation period – and those 21 months could be crucial for the survival of the UK's fishing industry – will the same happen for a trade deal whereby the EU refuses to separate access to market and access to UK waters?. No one knows until

that crunch point arrives.

The White paper, in my opinion, places too much emphasis on flawed the quota system. In this, it copies Norway and New Zealand. Neither of their fisheries management systems would rejuvenate our coastal communities. However it is admitted other management systems are available and HMG would be prepared to trial such systems, which I passionately believe would dramatically increase our scientific data, as every fishing vessel should become a scientific data point.

Throughout Brexit the UK has made the serious mistake of not understanding the functioning of the EU, and has therefore put forward proposals that were inevitably going to be rejected. It will be interesting to see what today's White paper states, and if it in turn is expecting policy that the EU can't provide.