

# The great Brexit fisheries betrayal – it gets worse

Michael Gove and Theresa May between them are letting down our fishing industry when there is no need for them to do so. It seems that our Prime Minister is willing to sacrifice the livelihoods of thousands of men to save her skin after finding herself outplayed by the EU.

The parallels between Mrs May and her predecessor are becoming more apparent by the day. When David Cameron headed for Brussels to re-negotiate our membership in late 2015, it does appear that he genuinely believed that he could wring concessions out of the other 27 member states and come back with a deal which would be acceptable to the majority of the electorate. However, he set off with no well-thought out model in mind of how the UK could function in a semi-detached manner from Brussels – still within the EU but somehow pursuing a different path. Unsurprisingly, he got nowhere, only gaining a few minor cosmetic concessions rightly described by Jacob Rees-Mogg as “thin gruel”. Undeterred, Cameron ploughed on, tried to avoid admitting that his renegotiations had got nowhere, lost the referendum and resigned.

For Cameron’s “renegotiation”, read Theresa May’s “deep and special” relationship. From the start, it was based on wishful thinking with no clear idea either of the details of the relationship nor – and more importantly – of how the EU works. Optimism that a trade deal would be easy to agree because of regulatory convergence soon dissipated as Michel Barnier repeatedly spelt out the EU’s intention to preserve the single market at all costs. Mrs May may not have realised what being a “third country” meant when she took over as Prime Minister and it is conceivable that the full implications still haven’t dawned on her, but she has been told in no uncertain terms that the EU is not going to give its former

member preferential treatment.

What is more, having offered us thoroughly humiliating terms for any transitional period, the EU is already starting to talk tough about a final trading arrangement. All the indications are that in the critical area of fishing, she will roll over once again.

Just to remind ourselves, both Michael Gove and Mrs May consistently stated that we would leave the Common Fisheries Policy on 29th March 2019 and take back control of our Exclusive Economic Zone. However, the transitional deal does no such thing and both the Prime Minister and Mr Gove have been put on the defensive. Even after admitting that he had tamely surrendered on fishing, Mr Gove, questioned by the Lib Dem MP Alastair Carmichael, said:-

*"There is a significant prize at the end of the implementation period, and it is important that all of us in every area accept that the implementation period is a necessary step towards securing that prize. For our coastal communities, it is an opportunity to revive economically. For our marine environment, it is an opportunity to be managed sustainably. It is critical that all of us, in the interests of the whole nation, keep our eyes on that prize."*

Other awkward questions have been deflected by saying "But we want to leave the CFP – and indeed the EU; you don't" or words to that effect. It is a smokescreen to disguise the betrayal of our fishermen. It is a complete myth that if we can endure 21 months of EU control of fisheries, all will be wonderful at the end of transitional period. The EU's new discard ban means that any fishermen who has used up his quota for just one species may not fish again that year. Fishing for Leave has not hid its anger. it intends to **"mobilise and show our absolute disgust and heartbreak at our own government capitulating and sacrificing Britain's fishing grounds and coastal communities to continued EU mismanagement."** Watch this

space!

Of course, there is an element of points scoring by the other political parties who are making the most of the government's discomfort on this subject, but it would be wrong to say that MPs like the SNP's Brendan O'Hara of Argyll and Bute was acting purely from cynical motives when he said, *"I strongly advise the Prime Minister to read SNP fishing policy before she comments on it, as she has it spectacularly wrong. Will she explain to the fishing communities of Argyll and Bute why she has agreed to a deal that keeps them in the CFP without a voice? Is that not the worst possible deal that her Government could have achieved for our fishing communities?"*

He is quite correct – it is the worst possible deal. What has been overlooked by many commentators on this subject is the draft exit document contains the following in Article 125 part 4: *"Without prejudice to article 122(1) , the relative stability keys for the allocation of fishing opportunities referred to in paragraph 1 of this article shall be maintained."*

(Paragraph 1 relates to article 43(3) TFEU : *The Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt measures on fixing prices, levies, aid and quantitative limitations and on the fixing and allocation of fishing opportunities.*)

The relative stability keys are an allocation percentage per EU country by species for the sharing out of the quotas. The paragraph above makes it clear that EU can change them, allowing them to take what they like out of UK waters. In that case, it will be of little consequence whether or not the EU insists on access to UK waters as part of a long-term trade deal. there will be no fishing industry left in our country anyway.

Yet all Mrs May can say in the face of rising cross-party anger about the sell-out of our fishing industry is, by

implication, to criticise the fishermen. She said *"Although I recognise that not everyone will welcome the continuation of current trading terms for another 21 months, such an implementation period has been widely welcomed by British business because it is necessary if we are to minimise uncertainty and deliver a smooth and successful Brexit."* Who else could she be referring to when mentioning those who will not welcome 21 months of the current trading terms? Fishermen can clearly be sacrificed to keep everyone else happy. She also dodged a question from Jeremy Corbyn when he raised the subject as one of a number of questions about the government's change of tack over Brexit:-

*"Our coastal and fishing communities were told by the Environment Secretary only this month: "The Prime Minister has been clear: Britain will leave the CFP"— common fisheries policy— "as of March 2019." Just a few weeks later, we find out that that will not be the case",* he said. The Prime Minister replied to some of his other comments but studiously ignored the issue of fishing.

Our friends in Fishing for Leave have many years of campaigning experiences and do not intend to roll over. Do not be deceived by the support from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation for this deal. This organisation represents those who have bought quota, not ordinary fishermen, who are absolutely livid.

It is possible that fishing could be the issue which provokes the crisis we have long been expecting. To repeat what we said then, *"it may require some senior heads to roll if the transitional blind alley is to be averted. it is a case of holding on to your hats."* Indeed; a Brexit which throws away what could have been a success story and sacrifices thousands of UK jobs is no Brexit at all.