

Brexit & the EU's Common Fisheries Policy



★ **BETTER OFF OUT** ★

**No to the European Union,
Yes to the Wider World**

www.BetterOffOut.net

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

THE BRITISH FISHING INDUSTRY

EU OVER-CENTRALIZATION

QUOTAS & DISCARDS

SUBSIDIES

BETTER OFF OUT

BACKGROUND

Britain joined the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy when it joined what was then the European Economic Community in 1973. The move has proved to be a disaster for the British fishing industry, for Britain's fish stocks and for our maritime environment.

Right from the start, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was skewed to favour the then existing members of the EEC and to disadvantage Britain. It was designed to give the French and the Dutch increased access to waters - particularly those around Norway, the UK, Ireland and Denmark. The CFP was hurriedly cobbled together by the EEC in the months before the new countries were due to join the EEC. It was presented to the new members as being a price they had to pay to secure admission to the EEC. British Prime Minister Edward Heath agreed. Others had more courage. The Norwegian fisheries minister resigned in protest, and a few months later the Norwegian people voted in a referendum against joining the EEC.

They aimed to give fishing fleets of all member states equal access to all fishing grounds belonging to member states. This was dressed up as being "fair", though in practice it stripped fishing communities of the waters on which they had relied for generations. Just as misleading were claims that it was designed to manage European fishing fleets with the aim of conserving fishing stocks, to prevent them being overfished. In fact the CFP was all about sharing out the spoils of the raid on the fishing grounds. Scientific evidence regarding minimum levels for spawning stocks, safe fishing levels and mesh sizes were routinely ignored.

British fishermen were fobbed off with being able to retain exclusive fishing rights within 6 miles of the UK coast line - though only for a limited time. This temporary derogation has been renewed since, but only at the cost of the British government being forced to give way elsewhere in order to secure this "concession", as the EU sees it.

In 1983 the CFP adopted a quota system which limited the amount of fish that could be caught by species and fishing ground - often referred to as Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Again, presented as a conservation measure it was in fact a commercial decision designed to divvy up which country could catch what.

In 1991 the EU Court of Justice decided to make a bad system worse. For purely political reasons they decided that any ship could register to be allocated the quota belonging to any state. Thus a Spanish ship could register for British quota. The decision meant that national allocations of quota now became meaningless. The Court viewed this as a beneficial step towards its dream of creating a European Superstate. The fishermen were thrown on the beach unemployed, the fish were plundered and stocks fell. The decision hit Britain hard. Since 1992 we have seen UK fishing fleets cut by 19% and by a further 40% in 1996.

Discards quickly grew into a major environmental disaster and financial catastrophe. Due to the introduction of the TAC under the CFP, fishermen have been forced to discard fish that are the wrong species. A fishing boat with a quota for haddock that inadvertently brings up some cod has to dump the cod back dead into the sea. Millions of tons of fish have been discarded in this way.

The introduction of a new CFP on January 1st 2014 still continues to hinder the British fishing industry, undermining small vessels and local British fishermen whilst benefiting the large, heavily-subsidised Spanish fleets.

Outside of the EU the UK could produce its own fishing strategy and seek to preserve fish whilst protecting the British fishing industry and environment. Crucially, Britain would automatically become a member of the major international fishing bodies with its own place at the top table. Currently Britain is represented by the EU, which has its own agenda to follow.

THE BRITISH FISHING INDUSTRY

Though the UK fishing industry has been shrinking due to quotas and EU regulations it is still of considerable value. In the UK there are around 11,800 fishermen, 2100 are part-time. Scottish and Northern Irish fleets mainly catch pelagic fish, which swim freely in the open ocean and include species such as cod, herring or mackerel. The English catch mainly demersal fish, which live on the

bottom in coastal waters and include species such as plaice, dab and sole. The Welsh generally concentrate on coastal shellfish. Pelagic fish make up the largest catch in terms of volume at 58% but are of the lowest value at 32%.

Scottish vessels account for 64% of UK landings whilst English boats bring in 27%. The vast majority of landings are from vessels over 24 meters (74%) but these amount to only 4% of UK vessels. This highlights the increasing importance of supporting local fishermen operating smaller boats - the very sector that is currently being damaged by EU legislation and regulations.

In England, Brixham in Devon has the highest landing quantity, landing 11,600 tonnes worth £21 million, just behind that is Newlyn in Cornwall with 11,300 tonnes but worth £22 million. Peterhead in Scotland has the highest landings in the UK with a 159,000 tonnes, worth £145 million. The fishing market in the UK is worth a considerable amount, yet is constantly being undermined and hindered by the EU. Subsidies to other member states allowing other fleets to expand and modernize whilst Britain's shrinks, as well as the process of quota hopping have all contributed to the declining fishing industry in the UK.



Cornish pilchards packed in the traditional barrel.

CFP OVER CENTRALIZATION

Although there are many problems surrounding CFP and its impact on British fishermen, many of them are due to one all pervading issue - over centralization (a common occurrence within the EU).

The main impact of centralisation is the lack of understanding of local issues by those who make the decisions. A good example of this is the proposed ban on drift nets. Large drift nets have a severe impact on fish stocks in the Mediterranean and their use should be ended. However, UK fishing boats using drift nets are smaller, their nets are smaller and so are more carefully deployed. Compared to the Mediterranean nets they are smaller, more cost effective and more environmentally friendly. The introduction of this ban would help the Mediterranean but see the closure of small scale UK driftnet fisheries such as herring, mackerel, sole and bass. This one size fits all policy is a key demonstration of over centralised nature of Brussels and the EU institutions, failing to acknowledge local industry. Bringing powers back to the UK would allow more flexibility allowing authorities to favour their own fleets.

Secondly, the CFP is destroying fishing communities. The falseness of the declared purpose of the CFP to preserve stocks and prevent overfishing, is revealed by the fact that major stocks are still being overfished. It is estimated that the combined EU fishing fleet is double the sustainable level. Quota hopping has benefitted big commercial fisheries such as those common in Spain, whilst destroying local small businesses making small scale fishing unsustainable for many fishermen operating around the British coast.

Over centralization fails to take into account how these regulations harm local fishermen with small vessels.

QUOTAS & DISCARDS

One of the biggest impacts that the CFP has had on the British fishing industry has been the introduction of quotas - and the attendant problem of quota hopping.

The imposition of quotas is a perfectly reasonable way to manage fish stock and ensure a sustainable population of fish supporting a long-term industry. But this is only the case if the quota system is managed according to best scientific advice with the aim of preserving the stocks. Unfortunately, the current CFP policy is damaging to the UK and fails to ensure stock are retained at a sustainable level. The new CFP implemented as of January 2014, claims for itself the aim of ensuring the maintenance of long term stock through the introduction of catch limits be implemented between 2015 and 2020. Unfortunately it perpetuates many of the problems of the past with quotas set as a result of political pressures to give each EU member state a share of a dwindling resource, and quota hopping remains.

The TAC is the maximum quantity of fish that can be caught of a particular species in a certain area. This is divided among member states in the form of national quotas, however with the introduction of quota hopping it has seriously damaged the British fishing industry by allowing ships from other member states fishing fleets to grab quota that should go to British boats.

In 2013 UK vessels landed 624,000 tonnes of sea fish including shellfish in the UK and abroad, valued at £718 million. This shows a 1% decrease in quantity and a 7% decrease in value in comparison to the previous year. The EU's CFP is primarily concerned with intervention and protection, neglecting the market's role and downplays free trade. The use of quotas has failed in protecting stocks and by being cut year on year, has seriously harmed fishermen. It doesn't acknowledge demand which has resulted in dumping, and it has seen the UK fishing industry decline, selling out quotas to Spain and failing to support smaller fishing vessels.



A rich haul of spurdog (a species of dogfish) caught off Cornwall in 2015. This fish is locally abundant, but CFP rules restrict catches as it is overfished elsewhere.

Discarding - throwing dead fish back into the sea - has a detrimental impact on the environment. Healthy fish are taken out of the ocean, reducing the breeding stock, but the discards don't count towards the quota.

The introduction of the quota system, intended to protect the environment, has done the opposite. It is estimated that 13% of the catch in the North Atlantic is discarded every year. EU restrictions on size and species caught continue to harm the environment they were designed to protect, along with damaging the UK fishing industry.

SUBSIDIES

Subsidies have had a detrimental impact on Britain, not only is the system highly inefficient it is also unfairly distributed amongst member states, damaging the trade for smaller local fishing craft. Between 2000 and 2006 Spain received nearly 50% of the fisheries subsidies, four times more than the next highest recipient Italy and three times more than Germany, Poland and the UK combined. The EU's fisheries budget has continued to rise, the new budget outlined between 2014 to 2020 sets the UK to receive €243.1 million in comparison to Spain receiving €1.16 billion and France €588 million, more than double that of the UK.

The way in which the budget has been distributed and spent has been highly inefficient, paying for vessel acquisition, construction, repair and modification to name but one area. In doing so we have seen Spain modify and expand using one set of subsidies, while scrapping smaller vessels using another set. The UK along with most other member states like Italy, have used the aid to reduce the fleet size,

whilst Spain and France use tax payers money to expand. Between 2000 and 2006 the Spanish constructed 53 new vessels 50 of which were over 30 meters, whilst Britain continues to decline.

The Financial instrument for fisheries Guidance (FIG) supported the construction of 3000 vessels and modernisation of 8000, whilst scrapping only 6000 - most of which were small inshore vessels. Subsidies have seen Britain's fishing industry decline, neglecting smaller local fishermen and supporting the large Spanish vessels.

BETTER OFF OUT

Leaving the EU and its notorious CFP, would benefit Britain's fisheries industry. Britain would remain a member of the International Council for the Exploration of the sea, the Northwest Fisheries Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN. Not only would we be able to defend our market access through these bodies but we would regain control of our own voice. Instead of the EU officials "representing" Britain - but in reality speaking up for the fishing fleets of other states - British officials answerable to the British Parliament would represent us. That would allow us to develop a more environmentally friendly system acknowledging the markets and tailoring a policy to protect local fishermen and smaller vessels.

Britain would be able to regain control of its seas and have a stronger hand in negotiating trade elsewhere. Norway - which has remained outside the EU and the CFP has been extremely successful having its own representatives on such bodies as the Food and Agriculture Organisation. Norway has shown the way forward, Britain should follow.

Our seas are rich, giving us a strong hand. By no longer supporting overseas subsidies, whilst getting little in return, we would seek to support our fishermen, moving away from a centralized one size fits all policy. In David Cameron's recent renegotiation the EU made it clear that it would not allow Britain to leave the Common Fisheries Policy. It was not even on the table for discussion.

Britain used to have a sustainable, environmentally-friendly fishing industry supporting large numbers of men and women in employment both at sea and on shore. Britain can have such an industry again, but only if we leave the European Union and take our fishing industry out of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Britain would be Better Off Out!

Join the Better Off Out Campaign to work for a better future for Britain

Contact us:

- Email our National Campaign Manager, Rupert Matthews at rupert@tfa.net
- OR Write to: Rupert Matthews
Better Off Out,
Golden Cross House,
8 Duncannon Street
Trafalgar Square
London WC2N 4JF

You can follow us on:

-  Facebook at 'Better Off Out'
-  Twitter '@BetterOffOut'
-  YouTube at 'Better Off Out'



Published by Better Off Out of Golden Cross House, 8 Duncannon Street, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JF.

www.BetterOffOut.net