

MP's Briefing: The Fisheries Bill

What does the Bill say?

The Fisheries Bill sets out broad powers for the Secretary of State or devolved administrations to make legislation in the future. The Bill fails to deliver on its objectives to rebuild fishing communities and create sustainable fisheries on a number of counts:

1. **DUTIES, NOT OBJECTIVES:** The bill sets out a number of *objectives* for future policy, including sustainability, an ecosystem approach and discards objective. However, without a *duty* for public authorities to act, the objectives are unenforceable. There is a risk that medium-term sustainability objectives will be sacrificed under political pressure to allow overfishing in the short term. The urgency of the overfishing issue is too great to leave to chance.
2. **MEANINGFUL TARGETS FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING:** Through the European Union, the UK is signed up to a commitment to fish all stocks to a level that will lead to maximum productivity (Fishing at Maximum Sustainable Yield - MSY) by 2020. This is missing from the Fisheries Bill, which contains only a vague reference to MSY. [Two thirds of UK stocks](#) have been fished beyond their sustainable limits. Our fisheries could yield [45% higher landings, an additional Gross Value Added of approximately £150 million and an additional 2,400 full-time equivalent \(FTE\) jobs](#), if they were allowed to recover, so failing to set meaningful recovery targets is harming jobs and incomes for fishers.
3. **TACKLING DATA DEFICIENCY:** At present some UK fisheries – smaller fleets in particular - are missing out on being able to market their fish as sustainable because they lack the data to prove sustainability. This is unfair, and a missed opportunity to secure economic sustainability for our coastal communities.
 - Only 12% of the stocks targeted by the inshore fleet in England have the data necessary to achieve sustainability certification, the rest were determined ineligible in a [2013 study](#). By comparison, for the stocks targeted by larger industrial boats, [80% have a stock assessment](#) – still not enough, but significantly more than for stocks targeted by the small scale fleet.
 - The market for sustainable fish growing [ten times faster than for conventional fish](#).
 - In a [recent report](#), we found that UK fisheries are losing out on millions of pounds of business because companies are looking abroad for fish that meets their sustainable buying policies.
4. **TRANSPARENT REPORTING:** Despite [previous proposals](#) to release an 'annual statement' on the sustainability status of UK stocks, this has been missed out of the Bill. Transparent reporting is the fundamental basis of good resource management and fisheries are no exception.
 - The Government has promised to create '[a gold standard for sustainable fishing](#)'. Without transparent information, we can't evaluate the success or failure of this promise, or hold this and future governments to account.
 - A public statement would help fish buyers to make sustainable choices and improve our ability to market UK landed fish as sustainable, here and abroad.
 - Publicly-available data is a basic tenet of a world-leading fisheries management regime. Australia – considered a world-leader on many aspects of fishing management - publishes [such a statement](#) on their website.
- **ALLOCATE QUOTA MORE FAIRLY:** The current system of sharing out the UK's fishing quota (Fixed Quota Allocation) has allowed quota to be [bought up by a few large multinationals](#) – [many of which are owned overseas](#). It also fails to

encourage sustainable fishing and is too rigid to reflect the changing conditions of the oceans. The Bill proposes to keep the existing quota allocation system the same, and only *consider* a fairer system for any new quota which may be 'won' through Brexit negotiations. Instead, the Bill should commit to identifying a set of criteria to define environmentally and socially responsible fishing, and switch a meaningful portion of quota over to the new system over time, encouraging community quota-sharing schemes and greater control for fishing communities.

5. **FUNDING:** Upon leaving the EU, UK fishers, businesses and organisations will no longer be eligible for funding through the EMFF (European Fisheries and Maritime Fund) which has made €243.1m available between 2014 and 2020. We urgently need a re-statement of the [commitment that fishing communities will not lose out on funding after Brexit](#). In fact funding for data collection, sustainability improvements including certification, and promoting and marketing sustainable fish should increase. It is difficult to see how the objectives for science-based sustainability will be achieved otherwise.

Why a strong bill is needed now: The draft withdrawal agreement & fishing

The proposed withdrawal plan says: The UK will continue to be part of the EU Common Fisheries Policy until the end of 2020. In the meantime, both parties aim to agree a deal – for fishing the deal must include agreeing how EU boats can access UK waters, and tariffs applicable to UK fish exports. The 'backstop' tariff-free agreement will only apply to fish if such an access deal has been agreed. (If no deal is agreed – tariffs are likely to apply).

The Fisheries Bill is vital to give certainty to fishers and the fishing industry. At present, it isn't certain:

- **That the UK will be able to catch more fish after Brexit.** The UK will very likely have the power to control which boats enter its water, but not how much fish is caught. The latter will still be agreed via negotiation with the EU states, Norway and Iceland. Under international law (as well as common sense) the UK is obliged to collaboratively agree Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for shared stocks with other nations.
- **That there will be any benefit for small-scale fishing communities from any increased quota.** The UK Government already has the power to deliver more quota to smaller fishing communities (see point 5 above) – there is a risk that, with no guarantee of increased quota, or with marginal increases in quota, that unless changes are made to the UK's quota allocation system, coastal communities will not benefit from any Brexit scenario.
- **That the fishing industry will be better off as a whole from fishing:** About 50% of all the fish caught in the UK is exported to Europe and the EU is a particularly important market for top-end shellfish like lobster, prawn (langoustine), scallops and crab. The [effect of even small tariffs would be significant](#).

The bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a better future for fishers, but this must come from the Bill, not left to chance in negotiations with the EU. MPs can help by supporting amendments to the Bill that will *ensure* a better deal for fishers in the future – regardless of the outcome of a trade deal or future access arrangement, including:

- A legal duty to rebuild fish stocks – which will create thousands of new jobs in fishing, food processing and sales, as well as improving food security across the UK
- Targets to tackle data deficiency to help fisheries prove that they are sustainable
- Transparent reporting – to ensure promises to deliver a Green Brexit can be monitored