

A SUSTAINABLE BRITISH FISHING INDUSTRY

A FISHING POLICY FOR AN INDEPENDENT BRITAIN

A POLICY STATEMENT



UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY

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Introduction

One of the greatest betrayals on joining the EEC in 1973 was the total betrayal of the British fishing industry – what Edward Heath regarded as ‘a price worth paying’ for membership.

From a traditional, healthy, buoyant industry managing some of the richest fishing grounds in the world, UK fishing has been decimated by the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), its fishing fleets deliberately and methodically destroyed, its fishing ports and their related support structures from Newlyn to Peterhead, Northern Ireland to Lowestoft, turned into ghost ports, with British coastal waters now just a bit part of EU ‘common’ waters and French quotas exceeding British quotas in the English Channel.

Yet the British Falkland Islands are a model of success in terms of prosperous, well-managed British waters open to foreign fishing boats on fair and reasonable licensing terms. What the Falklands enjoy is denied through EU servitude to British fishermen.

This is in contrast to a CFP that even the EU’s own Court of Auditors has found to be a social, economic and environmental disaster. The high levels of fish discards are an obscene daily reality under CFP mismanagement.

Despite all-party criticism of the CFP, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) is the only party with the opportunity to restore British fishing to its former glory in a meaningful and practical manner, to bring a nutritious meal back on to the tables of the least advantaged, and contribute to the UK’s economy substantially once again. This is the aim of this policy statement.

1. The Problem – UK Fishing Today

1.1 Since joining the then Common Market 30 years ago, the British fishing fleet has been reduced to less than half its former size and is still in decline. British fishing grounds have been overfished in some areas and for some species almost to the point of collapse.²

1.2 Membership of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is an unmitigated disaster ecologically, socially and industrially (*Owen Patterson, Conservative MP*) The CFP is unsustainable, untenable, stifling, destructive and indefensible.

1.3 Fishing at sea is a total EU ‘competence’. Under the terms of the Accession Treaty, the UK handed over control of fisheries in our waters to the then EEC to be shared by other (and future) member states ‘equally and without discrimination’.¹

1.4 Brussels now has control of how and when we fish and how much fish we can catch. The UK provides the EU with 70% of its fishing but we are allowed only 13% by value of the quota species catch.³ This 13% equates to about 20% of the total catch in British waters and is still worth £500 million a year, which means that we are giving away to EU interests about £2 billion a year in fish, plus the value added costs of boat-building and repair, fish processing, employment and ancillary services, in total about £2.5 billion.⁴

1.5 Our fishermen, over the years, have had to cope with a quota system arbitrarily imposed by Brussels in the name of conservation. By EU Diktat, all fish caught above quota or undersized have to be dumped back into the sea, dead. The EU’s own estimate is that 40% of all fish caught is dumped as ‘discards’, which could be as much as two million tons of perfectly edible fish being thrown over the side every year.

1.6 This discard policy contravenes the UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) with regard to dumping.⁵

1.7 Every year, after rounds of political ‘horse-trading’ between the 27 member states of the EU, most quotas are reduced and we have now reached the stage when some fishermen, particularly those who operate ‘under 10-metre’ boats, just cannot make a living

1.8 On top of all this, the EU has allowed mainly Danish interests to take a million tons of sand eels and pout from the North Sea using ‘industrial’ fishing methods. This particular fishery has been overfished to the point where the Danes have been unable to fill their quota for many years and last year took only about 300,000 tons. Sand eels are the basic food source for cod and certain seabirds, which explains the dramatic decline in the North Sea cod fishery and the virtual abandonment of many Scottish seabird colonies.

2. UKIP's Vision – Executive Summary

The UK Independence Party advocates a policy of :

- Restoring British waters and fishing to national control by leaving the European Union Common Fisheries Policy
- Abandoning all quotas and strictly forbidding ‘discards’
- In co-operation with scientists and working fishermen, introducing technical measures and net design to be more selective, allowing immature fish and non-targeted species to escape
- Requiring all commercial species fish caught, regardless of size or species, to be landed and recorded in order to compile meaningful figures to establish a Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and to plan accordingly
- Establishing Minimum Landing Sizes (MLS) for all commercial species and ensuring that only fish above the MLS are offered for sale. All undersized fish to be confiscated and processed into either fish meal or fertiliser, proceeds from the sale of which will go towards administrative costs
- Establishing a system of moveable ‘No Take Zones’ seasonally to allow fish to spawn, or in areas considered to be overfished to allow recovery
- Banning all forms of ‘industrial’ fishing and pair trawling for bass. Restricting beam trawling to areas considered suitable by working fishermen and scientists
- Licensing foreign fishing boats with a proven record of fishing in the UK’s Exclusive Economic Zone to continue for a transition period of, say, five years, provided they observe British rules. Licences would not be offered to foreign boats in receipt of EU subsidy and foreign boats would not be licensed to fish in UK territorial waters (12-mile limit). After the transition period, licences would only be issued to foreign boats if fish stocks exceeded of British boats’ catch capability in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
- Building artificial reefs
- Encouraging profitable mariculture (fish farms), particularly encouraging shellfish farm ventures in suitable inshore waters
- Establishing a Fisheries College and a Crew Training school and conducting properly structured training programmes
- Taking advice from Norway and Iceland to establish a Fishing Ministry to overseeing a Fishing Management Agency and co-ordinating the activities of the existing Sea Fisheries Committees (SFCs), who would become the ‘front line’ of sustainable management of our fish stocks
- Strengthening the fishery protection service and providing adequate Naval ships to effect distant water patrols (minesweepers in a dual role).

3. What the UK Independence Party proposes

The main plank of UKIP's Fishing Policy must be the return of our fishing grounds to national control and thereafter to manage them in a sustainable way. The Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) sets out the international obligations of maritime nations and defines areas which come under the sovereign control of those nations:

1. Territorial waters extending 12 nautical miles from the maritime baseline
2. An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extending 200 nautical miles from the Coastal State's maritime baseline (or to a median line equidistant from it and any neighbouring state less than 400 miles away
3. The High Seas zone beyond the national EEZ.

In accordance with the provisions of this convention, UKIP will advocate that government declare that the UK has:

- Full sovereignty over all that is found within its 12 (nautical) mile territorial sea
- Sovereign rights over the natural resources found in its EEZ
- Jurisdiction over its own vessels on the high seas and freedom to fish on the high seas subject to limitations related to treaty obligations and the duty to co-operate in the conservation of fish stocks (straddling stocks and migratory fish).

The fundamental principle on which the whole policy rests is that fish and other sea creatures within the UK EEZ are the property of the nation as a whole.⁶

The British Isles are situated in the middle of a continental shelf and their shores are washed by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. The resulting nutrients from the shallow sea and the warm water mean that around our coasts we have the finest fishing grounds in Europe, if not in the world, which, managed correctly, will last forever.

The British fishing industry is almost in a state of terminal decline. It can only be saved by reasserting control over UK waters by leaving the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). With national control we can:

- Stop the wasteful and morally indefensible practice of dumping edible fish caught over quota back into the sea
- Reverse the rapid decline in the numbers of British boats and people engaged in fishing
- Protect the vital coastal eco-system
- Stop the destructive practice of industrial fishing for sand eels and pout
- Stop the slaughter of dolphins by French pair trawlers fishing for bass
- Stop the destruction of our coastal infrastructure
- Return about £2.5 billion a year to the national economy.

4. Our policy in detail

With the return to national control, we acknowledge that there will be a need to restrict the catches of certain species in order to allow recovery of areas or species after overfishing and to allow mature fish to spawn. In particular, we would regulate the fisheries to prevent the catching of immature fish and to maintain the 'food chain'.

In order to meet these aims we would seek advice from both marine scientists and practical fishermen so as to introduce technical methods of improving nets and selective methods of fishing to reduce both 'by-catch' and the catching of under-sized fish.

We would establish moveable and seasonal 'no catch' areas (also known as No Take Zones, or NTZs) to allow fish to spawn or to allow specific areas to recover from overfishing and we would introduce very strict controls on the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) of fish offered for sale to ensure that fish reach maturity before being caught.

Any rationing required thereafter, as advised by scientists and working fishermen, would be achieved by limiting days at sea in a fair and equitable manner.

We would abandon quotas and discards and would generally require all fish caught to be landed in a UK fishing port. The catch would then be examined and recorded by Fisheries Officers. It is essential that all fish caught are recorded in order to help scientists, administrators and fishermen to establish a Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) with clear and provable information. All fish above the pre-determined Minimum Sales Size (MSS) would be offered for sale and the rest confiscated. The confiscated part of the catch would be either processed as fertiliser or sold to fish farmers as fishmeal, with proceeds going to help the costs of administration.

Fishermen would soon realise that they would only be rewarded through catching mature fish and would adjust their nets and fishing methods accordingly to allow small and immature fish to escape. Having nets with a bigger mesh will bring the added advantage of less drag and a reduced fuel bill.

Returning our waters to national control, will, of course, be disputed by all EU countries and particularly by Spanish, French, Dutch and Belgian fishermen. In order to avoid an economic crisis in European fishing communities, UKIP would advocate a transition period of, say, five years, during which time foreign fishing boats with a proven history of fishing in the British EEZ could be licensed to continue, providing they observed our rules with regard to 'no fish' areas, types of net and mesh sizes, MSS and days at sea regulations. Whereas we would prefer that they land in a British port, we have to accept that their market is their home port and allow them to clear British waters after reporting their catch to a Fishery Protection vessel or to a British Sea Fisheries Officer ashore, by radio, and then being subject to physical inspection if deemed necessary.

This policy would, of course, be open to some abuse and it would be necessary to greatly strengthen our Fishery Protection resources, particularly the Royal Navy's

Mine Countermeasure Squadrons, and to treat any contravention of the rules with heavy fines and a ban on future fishing rights.

Any licence issued would be to the ship and not the owner. If the ship were sold, the licence would be lost.

Foreign fishing boats would not be allowed to fish within the UK limit of territorial waters (12 miles). After a 5-year transition period, licences would only be issued to foreign fishing vessels if it was deemed that there was a surplus of fish in the British EEZ which British boats would not be able to catch, in accordance with International Law as prescribed by UNCLOS.⁷

UKIP deplores subsidies paid to some EU countries (particularly Spain). It is madness to pay British trawler owners to decommission and at the same time pay large subsidies to Spanish owners to build big, modern fishing vessels. To maintain a 'level playing field', no fishing vessel that was in receipt of subsidies in her build or maintenance would be considered for a licence to fish in UK waters.

Wreck fishing and artificial reefs

Having observed the rich abundance of fish around wrecks and the popularity of 'wreck fishing', UKIP would advocate the building of artificial reefs to allow fish to breed without being trawled over. Builder's rubble, old tyres, redundant oil rigs and perhaps even scrap cars could be utilised to build reefs, taking pressure off landfill. Of course, they would have to be built with great care, in full consultation with the fishing industry, and charted exactly.

Beam trawling

UKIP is of the opinion that 'beam trawling' can be both beneficial and destructive. Beam trawlers can stir up the seabed, disturb worms and suchlike which become food for predatory fish and generally improve the productivity of the area trawled over in much the same way as a farmer improves the productivity of his land by ploughing. On the other hand, heavy gear pulled by powerful trawlers can dig up the seabed, dislodge heavy boulders and sometimes can be destructive (particularly to coral growth).

We would seek advice from scientists and working fishermen on which areas are suitable or unsuitable for beam trawling and legislate accordingly.

Pair trawling for bass

There is no doubt that pair trawling for bass results in an unacceptable level of a 'by-catch' of dolphins. We would ban this method of fishing in British waters.

Industrial fishing for sand eels

Industrial fishing for sand eels, as practised by mainly Danish vessels in the North Sea, is already responsible for the dramatic decline in cod stocks – sand eels being a cod's prime food source. We would also ban this style of fishing in British waters.

Crab and lobster fisheries

We would also recommend that by arrangement with the local Sea Fisheries Committee (SFC) and the industry, areas be designated as 'no trawl' zones to allow crab and lobster fishermen to go about their business without fear of losing their gear.

Recreational sea anglers and small unlicensed fishing boats

It is considered that the total size of the catch by sea anglers and small unlicensed boats (yachts that throw a line over the side) is so small as to be of no consequence. It would be almost impossible to police adequately recreational fishing at sea and we would not seek to introduce rod licences for sea anglers.

However, we are aware that professional fishermen resent recreational fishermen selling their catch (particularly bass to hotels) and would consider introducing legislation to treat recreational fishermen selling fish below the MLS as 'poachers'.

Fresh water anglers should remain as they are now, subject to the rules of their clubs, landowners and the Environment Agency, whereas anyone fishing in salt water with rod and line, nets or fish traps becomes subject to sea fishery rules and by-laws.

Mariculture

UKIP would encourage all forms of profitable mariculture but is concerned that some fish farms generate an unacceptable level of effluent and that 'escapees' from fish farms could have a degenerative effect on wild fish stocks. We would particularly support shellfish farm ventures in suitable inshore waters.

Wind farms

We are opposed to large scale wind generated electric power on land on subsidy and efficiency grounds, but are amenable to offshore wind generation if economic without subsidy. However, UKIP would oppose the establishment of all wind farms that impinge on established fishing grounds. If justified, we will insist that offshore wind farms such as the huge facility planned for the Bristol Channel, north of Lundy and bigger in area than the Isle of Wight, be constructed in such a way that individual turbines act as anchor points for fish farm nets and arrangements be made for fish farm attendants to enter and work within the area in safety.

General Management

We believe that management of our fisheries should be the responsibility of a Fisheries Minister, outside and separate from the existing Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), who will oversee a separate ministry. The ministry will co-ordinate the activities of an overall Fishery Management Agency and the existing SFCs and generally establish an overall rule of law in the fishing industry.

The composition of SFCs should be mainly elected fishermen and a few appointed officials from the ministry and/or local authority. They must be properly funded by Central Government and be given powers to make by laws and to direct enforcement officers. It is vital that they be kept 'local' both in membership and responsibility. Management generally should follow the successful Norwegian/Icelandic systems.

British Sea Fisheries Officers, employed and trained by the government minister's department and directed by SFCs, should be principally responsible for enforcement of fishing laws and bye-laws.

Policing our fishing grounds out to the 200-mile limit and/or the median line will require considerable deep sea effort which can only be provided by the Royal Navy. Naval officers in ships deployed for Fishery Protection duties will require training and must be given powers equivalent to British Sea Fisheries Officers. Currently, the Royal Navy has neither the ships nor sailors to provide the effort required and we must prevail on the Ministry of Defence to provide sufficient Mine Countermeasures ships capable of dual purpose minesweeping and fishery patrols.

We must oppose absolutely any British involvement in the proposed EU 'Coastguard', which can only be regarded as an embryo EU Navy.

Measures to restore the fishing industry and to make it financially viable

Europe and, indeed, the world, is incredibly 'fish hungry'. Once we have reasserted national control over British fishing grounds and instituted sustainable controls, fish stocks will recover quite quickly. With foreign vessels subject to fairly strict licensing rules, competition will be reduced and market forces will persuade British owners to rebuild their fleets and this will have a beneficial effect on boat building and repair, marketing and fish processing.

To begin with there will probably be a qualified manpower shortage. To alleviate this shortage, UKIP advocates the establishment of a Sea Fisheries College, which would give courses up to degree standard to qualify skippers, fisheries officers and fishing scientific officers. We would also establish a Fisherman's Training School to train deck and engine room crews as part of an apprenticeship scheme.

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Acknowledgments

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We have also 'noted' the Conservative Party's 'Green' paper on fishing prepared by Owen Patterson MP.

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