

Brexit and Fisheries: A French View

With the EU's demand for undiminished access to UK fishing

surface, with some 774,000 square kilometres (the rest being EEZs in Crown dependencies or British Overseas Territories). Putting aside Norway, which is outside of EU marine management, the UK EEZ is the greatest shared EEZ operating under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in Northern Europe.

By comparison, France's EEZ in Continental Europe represents about half the size of the United Kingdom's EEZ, with approximately 335,000 square kilometres, despite France having the second largest EEZ zone in the world approximately 10.2m square kilometres because of its numerous territories and overseas departments on all the oceans. UK waters are also particularly rich in seafood resource, as 40% of the total EU catches take place in the UK's EEZ but mainly exploited by the UK's neighbouring countries.

Because of these factors, and the geographical proximity between the two countries, France's fishing industry is now heavily dependent on UK waters. In fact, out of the three main traditional fishing regions: Normandy, Brittany and Hauts-de-France which all together represent 75% of the French fishing industry two of them (Brittany and Hauts-de-France) rely on the UK waters for more than 50% of their catches. Overall, it is estimated that France receives approximately 30% of its catches in the UK's EEZ. This explains why the absence of a good fishing agreement post-Brexit could be very damaging for French fishermen (as it would also be for Belgium, Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Germany which are all fishing in UK waters).

Similarly, the UK would suffer if the EU decided to restrict access to the Single Market post-Brexit, or impose tariffs on the UK fishing exports. About 75% of the fish caught by the UK is exported, of which the majority is for the EU. On the other hand, Britons import most of the fish they eat, and 30% of these importations come from the EU. The discrepancy between imports/exports is due to the consumption habits of Britons who do not usually eat the species they catch in their

territorial waters, but prefer other fish varieties (tuna, cod, prawns). Regardless of how beneficial any future post-Brexit agreement will be for the UK, European regulations on fish would still apply to British fishermen and as a result British seafood products could be rejected at the EU customs if no certificate is printed by fishermen. It is unlikely that the UK would introduce such paperwork for imports, and so our opening comment about eating mackerel doesn't apply to British consumers.

The situation is potentially more complicated for exporters, at least initially until consumer demand impacts upon the market. But if the fishing opportunities that are allocated to individual fishing vessels in the UK will remain unaffected by Brexit (because it is within the UK's competence rather than the CFP), the quota rules of the CFP will however not apply anymore to the UK. The country will recover entire freedom to set its own rules on how fishing is carried out in its territorial waters and it will be able to decide on the fish stocks and volumes. The CFP will no longer limit British fishing in British waters. This would be a massive win for the UK fishermen.

We could reasonably argue that mutual administration and exploitation of a European EEZ would ensure it would protect endangered species or prevent overfishing (although international treaties already exist, e.g. the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), or if it were the only way to encourage a considerably better/more sustainable management/use of the seafood resource. But evidence shows that the CFP is not working in these respects. In 2003, the Royal Society in London already warned the EU that unless a real action to restrain fishing is taken now, there could be nothing left to fish in the future. This is mainly due to the recurring disputes between the EU members over the quotas; countries have a privileged access to specific seafood resource in their respective EEZ, but also have different

consumption habits, hence leading to divergent interests and recurring disputes. But it is also due to the lobbying of the corporate fishing industry.

As a result, instead of granting subsidies to local fishermen to encourage a more traditional and sustainable way of fishing, the CFP pushed the development of short term sea resource exploitation through generous financial support to

because it would be the EU's direct responsibility to redress the imbalance. The EU caused it, after all.