

A new UK fishing policy

I have long argued we should be able to produce a new UK fishing policy which is kinder to both our fish and our fishermen.

Fishing for Leave has come up with some interesting proposals designed to allow us to catch more fish for our own consumption whilst conserving more fish at the same time.

As they point out, it is not difficult to design a better policy than the long lasting Common Fisheries Policy. This was based on a quota system for each type of regulated fish. A fishing vessel had to throw back all dead fish that did not conform to the required limits on landings. It meant the UK fishery caught a lot of fish that had to be dumped dead.

After years of this damaging approach they decided to try to ban dumping. This is difficult to enforce without cameras on every boat in the right places. It also means when enforced vessels are banned from fishing as soon as they hit quota problems on any given species.

Fishing for leave recommends a different approach. All fish caught should be landed and used. If we can eat all the fish caught we can catch far fewer fish than needed with a discard policy in place, whilst landing more than under the old policy. The fishery would be protected by limiting days at sea for the fleet, to limit overall catches. In order to stop vessels pursuing too many fish of a particular kind because it is valuable or popular the system would include reducing days at sea for any vessel that did pursue too many fish of a species that was at risk.

This proposal looks like a good basis for forming a new policy. The aim must be to protect our fishery so it is there for the future. There has to be some way to prevent excessive exploitation leading to a bad decline in fish stocks. It should also aim to deliver a fishing industry that does supply us with the fish we want to eat. We always used to have a surplus of fish when we ran our own policy, and can do so again.