

My speech during the debate on the Fisheries Bill [Lords]: New Clause 8 – Agency arrangements between sea fish licensing authorities, 13 Oct 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am almost seduced by Opposition amendment 1. It is an admirable idea that we should land more of our own fish in our own ports, but I am probably not going to make it to their Lobby, because they lack ambition—why only 65%? We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mr Douglas Ross) that the Norwegians and the Icelandics, who have had control of their own fisheries for much longer or never surrendered them, have much higher percentages than that. These are small, prosperous countries that took their destiny in their own hands, and they have a much finer fishing industry than ours—crippled as it has been for too many years by the common fisheries policy.

So full marks to the Opposition for wanting, for once, to go in the right direction, but let us have a bit more passion and ambition, because it is a disgrace that, after all these years in the common fisheries policy, the overwhelming majority of our fish is taken by others, and it is a disgrace that this great fishing nation imports fish to feed ourselves. I want to see a much higher percentage than amendment 1 suggests, because I think we need the food for ourselves or we would be very good at processing it and adding value to it. I do not just want fresh fish for our tables; I also want to see us putting in those extra factories and processing plants in our coastal communities so that they can produce excellent fish preparations or derivatives of fish for our own purposes and for wider export around the rest of the world. This is crucial.

I am afraid that I am not seduced by amendment 2 either. While I and the Government, and I think everyone in this House, think that sustainability of our fishery will be most important, I do not think it is the only aim, or even the prime aim. It is a very important aim that we want to use our fishery to feed ourselves and others, and to produce much better jobs, more paid employment and factory processing. It is very important, as others have said, that we look after the wider marine environment—not just the fish stocks, but the environment in which the fish and others are swimming.

I think we need to have multiple aims, and I think that is what the Government are setting out. The Government are very much in favour of sustainability, so when we wait—desperately worried—on these negotiations, I say, “Please, Government, do not give our fish away again!” That mistake has been made too often—in the original negotiations to go into the European Economic Community and in annual negotiations thereafter. Let us hope that our fish is not given away in those negotiations. If we cannot fish enough of it in the short term, because we still do not have the boats and the capacity, let us leave it in the sea and rebuild our stocks more quickly,

while we get that extra capacity. I would like to hear and see more from the Minister and the wider Government on how we are going to support the acquisition of much more capacity.

Should we not be helping fishermen and fisherwomen commission new boats from British yards, and have that combined shipbuilding capability and the fishing capability, leading on to the production capability? Many of our industries were badly damaged or demolished by our presence in the European Union. This is a prime example of an industry that was crippled. The scope for much greater prosperity for our coastal communities could be added to by the right schemes to get more boats, and by the right schemes such as enterprise zones that allow us to go right up the value chain and produce the best fish dishes in the world.

My speech during the debate on the Public Health: Coronavirus Regulations, 13 October 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Government are desperately trying to find that balance point between protecting livelihoods and protecting lives, and I am grateful to them for all they are doing to try to bring that off, but the only way forward is to get maximum buy-in from the public. There is no perfect set of rules or laws that can be enforced. We do not have enough police and that would require a mighty explanation task, so the more they can do by means of persuasion, the better.

Sharing with the public the dangers and showing them how hand washing, distancing and not mingling in enclosed spaces are going to work are the way forward. I am apprehensive about how much of this is enforceable.

Test and trace can work only if people who are traced are willing to co-operate. Quite a lot of people leave funny names, apparently, or they are not available when people are trying to contact them, or when they are told that they are a contact, they decide they are too busy to follow the procedures. They might genuinely be too busy and have real conflicts in their lives about looking after relatives, sorting out children, cooking meals at home or whatever it is, and it is very difficult suddenly to isolate if they do not have the property and the means to do all that, so we need to carry them with us. There needs to be a more energetic reliance on persuasion and less on formal rules.

My other worry about this strategy is that we need a plan B for the possibility that there is no early and successful vaccine. We all hope that the Secretary of State is right and we all hope that, by spring, there is a vaccine that works that can be produced at scale and that enough people want

to take it so the problem goes away, but there might not be and this might fall down on one or more of those requirements. I urge the Government to think through what is plan B, because we do not want this continuous cycle where the virus pops up, we impose controls, the virus goes down a bit, we relax the controls and the virus pops up again.

That is deeply destructive to social life and community life. It is going to destroy many more businesses and many more livelihoods. Many more jobs are going to be lost. Businesses need some greater certainty that they will be able to trade, so I urge the Government to be more open with us about what is plan B for no vaccine and more open with everyone about how long these controls have to last and what their purposes are.

The 10 o'clock rule has become the iconic one that is opposed by some and supported by others. The problem with it is that people find easy ways round it. They comply with leaving the pub, but then congregate in each other's homes and use off-licence booze. They might be breaking the rule of six, but feel that is a tolerable thing to do. The police cannot go to everybody's home to find out whether they are breaking the rule of six, but they can enforce turning out the pubs. It might be worse for people to drink at home than to drink in the pub, so rules have their limitations. Let us get more buy-in by persuasion. That is our job as politicians.

My intervention during the debate on the Public Health: Coronavirus Regulations, 13 October 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How long do the scientists think we will need these lockdowns for, and what is their exit plan?

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Matthew Hancock): We have seen the exit plan from local lockdowns. For instance, in Leicester, where we had a firm local lockdown, the case rate came right down. We lifted that and we have sadly seen it start to rise again.

The case rate is determined by the amount of social mixing, and it reduces during a lockdown. In some parts of the country where the case rate has continued to rise, there is an argument for further ensuring that we do not reach the level of contact that is at the root of the virus spreading. The challenge is how to calibrate the lockdown to get the virus under control while doing the minimum damage to the economy and to education.

Clean water – and plenty of it

I never understand why it is fashionable establishment thinking to want to limit our use of water. Water is the commonest of substances on our planet. Here in the UK we have plenty of fresh water on top of the huge volumes of salt water all round our coast, alleviating the need to filter the salt out of what we use.

There is a water cycle where the winds pick up water from the sea, form clouds and then deposit a lot of it on our islands. All we have to do is to store it in lakes or reservoirs and draw on it as required, with suitable cleaning and filtering to ensure safety if we drink it. Our using it does not destroy it. We pass it out in used and dirty form, only for it to go round the cycle again and re-emerge as clean water to use again.

The UK industry is heavily regulated. The price control regulation builds in a strict restraint on providing more water capacity, as the regulator effectively controls how much capital can be applied. We have a strange system where there is a single supply to each home, so you need to use drinking standard water on flushing loos and hosing your garden instead of using grey water for these purposes. Maybe the way to go is to encourage more homes to collect their own rainwater for lower grade uses, cutting the outflow through the dirty water system and reducing demand for high quality water.

It would be good if the regulators would allow a bit more capacity to be available. We are vulnerable to drought periods, so we do not want a repeat of the mid 1970s hot 1976 summer which would stretch the system too much. We keep adding homes and people to the south east with no new reservoir capacity. It cannot go on like that. We should be building new reservoirs now. They can be attractive landscape features, and would be welcome as an alternative to a new housing estate in a given area under pressure of development.

High standards are essential for drinking water. On the whole the UK achieves this. The issues relate to water rationing and future needs. As we move to growing more of our own food at home we will need more water for crops. Richer societies want more water for everything from showers to car cleaning and garden maintenance. Let's get on with catering for those demands from what should be a good growth business.

The water industry under its regulators has to tell people in the middle of a warm summer they should throttle back on water use, when they should be revelling in high demand. You do not hear the hot cross bun makers telling people at easter their buns are rationed because people want too many of them.

Exams next year

The Secretary of State for Education has set out the position for 2021:

Arrangements for exams and assessments in 2021

I am writing following the announcement setting out arrangements for exams and assessments in summer 2021. I believe every student must have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning, gain the qualifications they deserve, and progress to the next stage of their lives.

We acknowledge that students due to sit exams next summer have experienced considerable disruption to their education, and it is right that we give them, and their teachers, more time to prepare.

We have worked with the sector, Ofqual and exam boards to agree that most summer exams and assessments will start three weeks later than planned, without delaying students from progressing to their next stage of education or training. In addition to changes to the content of assessments for certain subjects set by Ofqual, this will give pupils extra time to prepare. These changes primarily relate to England, as well as students elsewhere who undertake exams offered by boards operating in England with qualifications regulated by Ofqual.

We recognise that a shorter exam window, when combined with the risk of selfisolation, may mean that some students miss exams. To mitigate this I have announced that one maths and one English GCSE paper will take place before the May half term. This will ensure there is sufficient time between papers, allowing Year 11 pupils who need to self-isolate to sit at least one paper in these core subjects.

To ensure students can begin the following academic year as normal, results days for GCSE, AS, and A levels will take place across two days in the same week of August; AS and A levels on 24 August and GCSEs on 27 August. Students studying level 2 and 3 vocational and technical qualifications for progression will receive their results no later than these dates. We also expect that, for the majority of vocational and technical qualifications taken alongside or instead of GCSE, AS and A level exams, awarding organisations will look to align timetables with 2021 exams.

Additional support for lost teaching time

These arrangements are backed up by significant support to help students make up for lost teaching time. We have previously announced a catch-up package worth £1bn, including a 'Catch-Up Premium' worth £650m. Our expectation is that this funding will be spent on additional support to help children and young people catch up after a period of disruption

We also announced a new £350m National Tutoring Programme which will increase access to high-quality tuition for disadvantaged and vulnerable students, helping to accelerate their academic progress and tackling the attainment gap between them and their peers. In addition, the 16-19 Tuition Fund provides up to £96m for small group tutoring for disadvantaged students in sixth forms, colleges and all other 16-19 providers.

Our continued commitment to exams in uncertain times

We are working closely with Ofqual over the coming weeks to engage with teaching unions, exam boards and other stakeholders to develop contingencies for all scenarios that may impede students from sitting their exams fairly. The Contain Framework includes expectations for how local lockdowns will affect education, including a statement that schools and colleges are to remain open. This government continues to make the education of children a priority, building on the remarkable efforts of teachers, students and parents across the country in keeping children in school – and in learning – through these challenging times.