

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.