

## A new fishing policy

There was no slot for me to speak in the fishing debate yesterday in the Commons ,such was the understandable pressure from MPs for fishing seats to speak.

What I wanted to say included the following

1. The government must not sacrifice our fish for the sake of some wider deal. The UK feels very strongly that we have been badly treated over fish from the original entry terms onwards. The Common Fishery Policy has been bad for our fish, bad for our fishing industry and bad for the marine environment.
2. When we take back control we should greatly expand the amount our own fishing fleets can catch, and require most if not all of the fish from our fishing grounds to be landed in the UK. We need to build a bigger fish processing and retailing industry.
3. The government should ban the ultra large predatory trawlers which damage the sea bed or the wider marine environment when scrambling to catch more fish, and attract too much bi catch as they do so.
4. We should strengthen our onshore protection vessel fleet to enforce our fishing rules, protecting our marine environment and managing our fish stocks well.
5. The new fishing policy should encourage a rapid expansion of our fishing fleets, with government help with the financing of suitable vessels and encouragement to the banks to lend for the purpose.
6. The new fishing policy should be part of a wider policy initiative to encourage far greater food self sufficiency and fewer food miles.

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## Time for change at the BBC

I wrote this last week for Free market Conservatives and am now reproducing it here:

The BBC are their own worst opponents. Their recent cancellation of a couple of much loved old songs that are famous worldwide and have not before caused protests led many of their former BBC news/Radio 4 audience to anger or despair. They are so dominated by the fashionable global political correctness and by the briefings from the EU and international bodies that they can no longer relate to the many in the UK who like our country, are at peace with most of its past and just wish to be entertained. They are ready to run any cause which wants more government, higher taxes, more spending by the state, more submission to international treaty rules and more dependence on EU suppliers. They revel in allegations of inequality and unfairness, whilst seeking to remove their own high payments to some talent from the

full public gaze. Their constant cry is government should do something. They tend to see business as a source of stories of overpayment and possible corruption, and show scorn for anyone who does not share their corporate values.

Last Saturday morning I made the mistake of listening to the Radio 4 Briefing Room programme about the EU/UK talks. For half an hour they paraded so called experts and BBC correspondents who gave us yet another tedious version of Project Fear. There was no attempt at any balance. No-one spoke for the UK and no-one spoke of the many advantages Brexit can bring. The overarching perspective was that supplied by the EU. There was no attempt to cross examine the EU position and ask about the risks to their big export trade into the UK and our opportunity to substitute UK produced product or cheaper rest of the world product with freedom from EU tariffs. There was no attempt to explore the big upside possible for more food grown and reared in the UK, nor of the way world competition will also affect EU suppliers where we do not have a domestic industry to protect. The importance and opportunity for our fishing industry was dismissed, though they did think fishing was important totemically for French and Spanish fishermen! It was as if they had joined the EUBC and had decided not to bother about the views of a majority of the UK licence payers.

The BBC's charter requires the BBC to be neutral and to allow a wide range of views and arguments to be put. Their news coverage does seek to give most political party representatives a hard time, and during elections in particular they are careful to observe the rules over representation. That does not make their overall output balanced. For years studies showed the BBC gave plenty of easy airtime to those who wished to make the case for the UK's membership of the EU, but gave far less time to those who wanted to leave. Those who did get on were interrupted, heckled and often presented in an unfavourable way as if their democratic cause was unworthy or absurd. Once the people had voted to leave the BBC would still not accept the verdict, and delighted in giving maximum exposure to the minority representing the global political establishment who wished to undermine or reverse the decision. Many of their storylines come from the Guardian and from Labour and Lib Dem research. They do not offer a similar range of stories for all those seeking to reduce taxes, expand prosperity through enterprise, query the conduct of nationalised monopolies and challenge the global consensus on major issues. To many in the BBC President Obama's substantial bombing campaigns were fine, but some of President Trump's tough or one sided statements designed as a substitute for military action are unacceptable.

It means reform of the BBC is in the air. This will be necessary anyway, as we thunder towards a very different media planet where people download much of their entertainment, get news from a range of worldwide instant services, and spend more time on social media than conventional media. The immediate issue is should the licence fee be a normal charge where payment is enforced by civil and not criminal means? How much longer anyway will the licence fee serve their needs, given the way many people can avoid live tv and so claim they do not need to pay it. A simple first reform would be to decriminalise the licence fee and unclutter the courts of the licence fee criminal cases.

In other guises the BBC would be against a poll tax. They should think again how best to finance their activities going forwards. What is good public service broadcasting and how much if any should be taxpayer financed?

Let's have a modern proposal. Shouldn't some of the BBC's current more commercial activities be paid for by the audience they can command as for other media outlets? We need a new settlement, with the majority of the country that did vote for Brexit feeling we can be included. The BBC should not offer unfair competition to other media outlets financed by their unique access to a dedicated poll tax.

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## **Tax rises would slow the recovery and increase the deficit**

The Treasury should be told that tax rises now would be bad economics and worse politics.

The deficit has soared because government anti virus policies created a huge and fast downturn. In a recession public spending soars and tax revenues fall. Cutting the deficit needs a fast and strong recovery, so Public spending falls and tax revenues rise. In this downturn public spending was massively boosted by taking 9 million people onto the state's wage bill whilst their jobs were prevented by lock down. We need to get them back into private sector jobs to remove the cost to the government and to get more tax revenue in from their better pay and overtime.

Far from needing tax rises we need rate cuts and tax holidays to promote more activity and jobs. The temporary cut in Stamp Duty is leading to many more housing transactions which will protect or create more jobs and increase tax revenues on the Activity in the housing market.

The Treasury has always been reluctant to accept that often the way to get more tax revenue is to cut rates to stimulate activity. That is what is needed now.

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## **Sterling rises again**

All those who think sterling will fall every time there is no progress on a Brexit deal need to think again.

Over the last month of reports of no progress in talks sterling has risen by 3% against the dollar and 2% against the Euro. Over the last year of talks

going nowhere sterling is now 10% higher against the dollar and 2% higher against the Euro.

So why no rush by the pro Remain forces to express pleasure, when they are so ready to rush out misleading releases wrongly blaming Brexit every time sterling dips?

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## **“A Union dividend”**

The UK government has started talking in terms of a Union dividend for Scotland. They tell us there is a “Union dividend of £1941 per person” in Scotland “demonstrating the strength of all parts of the UK working together”.

The “dividend” has two parts. Scottish taxpayers pay on average £308 a year less tax than the UK average. Scotland receives £1633 more public spending per person a year. The dividend of £1941 is up 7.5% on last year.

It is interesting that this increase has happened at a time when polls suggest support for independence is rising. This implies voters in Scotland either do not know this fact, or think there are more important things than taxes and spending levels.

The government is making an economic case for the Union. It points out Scotland would be massively in deficit if it were not part of the UK. The devolved Scottish government which has been given £6.5bn more to spend during the CV 19 crisis would be struggling on its own, with a £15bn or 8.4% budget deficit before the pandemic recession. This means an even bigger running deficit now.

The Union itself should not be in doubt as it was settled for a generation by a referendum a few years ago. I have always only wanted volunteers in our Union and pledged to respect whatever decision the Scottish people took in their big vote. Now is not the time to have another. Wanting to belong to a country is more about feeling and loyalties than about money for the believers on both sides of the argument.

For those with less passion about the issue it is important to remember the inability of the independent Scotland side to settle on what currency an independent Scotland would have or how it would handle a collapse in oil prices which duly happened. What do you think about the current level of the Scottish “dividend”? Why is there no English dividend?