

Let them eat hake

Yesterday we were told of yet more delay in taking back control of our fish. The government should tell the EU we will resume control in March 2019, as we need to put in a new policy to save what is left of our home industry and get it growing again.

There are two things the government has promised that I agree with

Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

No Deal is better than a bad deal.

It is difficult to know what the government will get in return for the very generous draft offers it has made over money, fish, law taking and freedom of movement for the so called Implementation period.

There is no need for an Implementation period unless there is something really good to implement which takes time.

My advice to the government is to make sure everything works on March 29 2019 when we want to leave. What could be sorted out or agreed after March 2019 that cannot be sorted out in the next year?

Let's cut back the period of uncertainty.

UK energy

This unseasonal cold weather has placed more strains on the UK electricity supply. Yesterday we were importing substantial volumes from France and the Netherlands, needing coal to generate 18.7% of our demand, and finding it difficult to get enough from renewables. Gas fired stations still provided the single biggest volumes at 37.3% of the total.

The EU is quite dependent on Russian gas. Fortunately the UK is not so dependent. 43% of our gas comes from our own fields, and it should be possible to increase that volume with the right policies. The largest source of UK imported gas is Norway, with significant quantities also coming in by tanker from places outside the EU like Qatar. It is the imported gas from the continent that does contain some Russian gas, where the continental system needs decent volumes of Russian gas to keep the whole system with sufficient pressure and volume to meet demand.

The threats to energy security that we sometimes hear in world arguments reinforces the case for the UK to look to greater energy independence. It will also help our large balance of payments deficit if we seek to supply

more of our own gas and electricity. The UK has increasingly linked itself into the EU system of energy markets. In doing so the UK has reduced its margins of capacity, cutting the amount of reserve electricity capacity it has, and removing an important part of its gas storage system. This has increased our import dependence and cut the resilience of our system

Closure of the remaining coal stations would seem unwise before we have put in place more reserve capacity that can function on cold days when there is little wind and sun to power the main renewables. Putting in place more gas storage would be wise, as would developing more local supplies. Relying on EU imports when they in turn rely more heavily on Russian gas does not look like a great policy.

Governing ourselves

The one senior job I have held which I grew to dislike was the job of being the UK's Single Market Minister. I was faced with an avalanche of new draft laws which the EU wished to put through in the name of the single market. It was difficult to see how most of these laws would help people buy and sell more with each other. It was a simple power grab for the EU to take control of more and more policy areas and laws. It was clear they would often keep out competition, limit innovation, favour the large incumbents and put up costs. They were united with the Customs Union approach, seeking to keep out non EU imports. I defined the job as damage limitation. Which draft laws could the UK persuade others to help block, to hold them up altogether? Which laws could be amended to limit the damage they did? Could smaller and more innovative businesses be exempted from them? We had our wins in all these categories.

The task was, however, made more complex by the fact that large parts of the UK civil service always wanted us to reach a deal. Quite often they would ensure my hands were tied by taking the issues to a Cabinet Committee which itself was primed to prefer deal to no deal and set minimum objectives for the UK to reach an agreement. It was usually easy to secure these objectives, because they asked for too little, or because it appeared someone would tip off the other key negotiators what my required bottom line was. They then usually offered it to me quite early on as they knew I would dig in until they offered the full requirement. Some realised I probably preferred no deal in most cases.

Some of the draft legislation was bizarre. They usually wanted to set out how certain goods or services were designed and offered, in ways which sometimes did not allow the UK method as their draft was based on some continental model. The UK then had to work hard to get amendments to allow us to carry on with successful business models we were using.

As we exit the EU we need to make sure Ministers provide good leadership to

their officials, explaining in future we wish to turn our backs on this way of legislating. It is high time we had the self confidence to pass our own laws that can be good for both customers and businesses. They should not set out how everything is to be done, as that gets in the way of competition and innovation. Laws are needed to ensure honest dealing and safety, but are not needed to tell businesses how to make things or to define services.

Tackling financial and related crime

I am keen to see what more we can do to protect elephants from death by poachers. Like many of my fellow countrymen and women I feel angry about the way these great animals are being killed to lay hands on their tusks.

I am also keen to see proper action taken against those who make big money from drug pushing, illegal arms dealing and other crimes and then seek to introduce the money into western markets. They seek to disguise it so they can enjoy the proceeds of making money out of others' misery.

This is all topical again with campaigns to ban the trade in old ivory works of art, and to freeze the accounts of certain rich Russians coming to London and investing.

Today I would like to hear your views on how we can tackle the underlying problem of serious crime, and how we should respond to calls to ban more trade and more people in the UK.

The trade in works of art from old ivory is conducted in London as well as in other advanced centres. The traders are meant to study and catalogue the items carefully, to avoid offering owners of recent ivory a way to release money from their holdings. There is plenty of legitimate ivory around. Every elephant years ago dying of natural causes may have surrendered tusks on death that were in some cases turned into works of art. What we wish to stop is the barbarism of killing elephants today for their ivory.

Would banning all sales of all ivory in the UK make a difference? Sales of old ivory items will continue in other world centres legally, and illicit sales of ivory items will doubtless continue against the law here at home without the benefit of so many experts trying to ensure the items are from ancient ivory. Shouldn't more be done to assist the countries where elephant poaching continues? Isn't the main issue an enforcement one in the places where elephants still live? It seems to me an ivory ban needs to be global to make a real impact. With a global ban then all ivory trading would be a crime and make it that much more difficult for the poachers to convert their winnings to cash.

When it comes to the issue of rich Russians, the UK needs to make clear it is not against people because they come from Russia, and is not arguing that rich Russians are a unique category that contains more criminals than other

groups of rich people from other countries. The Foreign Secretary is right to stress that Russians are welcome here as visitors and investors. The overwhelming majority of Russians like any other nationality obtained their money by hard work and enterprise and have a right to its safekeeping where they choose to live and invest. Many of the Russians here in the UK are opponents of Mr Putin, not trusted allies of the Russian government.

Of course the UK is also right to make clear we do not welcome murderers, money launderers and other criminals. We need to check the origins of large fortunes when they first arrive in the UK, as the comprehensive Money Laundering laws require banks and other financial institutions to do when they first accept a deposit or an investment sum from any new client. The government has powers to demand a person to explain where they got their wealth from. If proper money laundering checks are made on first entry of money into the system the UK authorities should know the answer and should expose the crimes before the money is ever accepted as a legal deposit.

None of this should be directed to most UK people who save out of net income or out of selling capital assets they own, sending cleared funds from one regulated account to another. All such transactions are visible to the UK tax authorities.

[South West Trains](#)

They are currently consulting on whether there would be much demand for a service on Boxing Day. Anyone with thoughts on this should send in their views to SW Trains.