

Press release: Government to publish plan for an independent fisheries policy

A blueprint for a sustainable and profitable fishing industry that will regenerate coastal communities and support future generations of fishermen will be set out today.

Outside the EU, the UK will be an independent coastal state and will regain control of our waters and natural resources, as well as the flexibility to negotiate with other countries and ensure stocks are fished sustainably.

The Fisheries White Paper – ‘Sustainable Fisheries for Future Generations’ – will chart our course for managing fisheries after Brexit. It will outline how powers to be proposed in the Fisheries Bill, which will be introduced in this session of Parliament, will give the UK full control of its waters and the ability to set fishing opportunities such as quota.

In particular the paper will set out how, as an independent coastal state, the UK will have the opportunity to move towards a fairer share of fishing opportunities – overhauling the current system where UK fishermen have received a poor deal that is based on fishing patterns from the 1970s. EU Member States currently land around eight times as much fish in UK waters than the UK does in EU Member States’ waters.

It will also propose a suite of measures to improve the sustainability of the fishing industry, supporting the next generation of fishermen while protecting our precious marine environment.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

As an island nation our fishing industry is the lifeblood of coastal communities around the UK.

I have been clear that when we leave the EU we will take back control of our waters, while ensuring we don’t see our fishermen unfairly denied access to other waters.

The plans set out today demonstrate the bright future in store as we build UK fishing industry for future generations by putting the importance of a healthy marine environment at its heart.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Leaving the EU creates a sea of opportunity for our fishing industry. Outside the Common Fisheries Policy we can take back

control of our waters and revitalise our coastal communities.

We will be able to put in place our own systems, becoming a world leader in managing our resources while protecting the marine environment.

We will work closely with everyone who has an interest in this important industry to make the most of this historic opportunity.

While the UK will continue to abide by Common Fisheries Policy rules during the implementation period, from 2020 we will be negotiating access to waters and fishing opportunities as an independent coastal state.

The white paper will set out a number of methods to explore fairer allocation of fishing opportunities, such as zonal attachment – which is based on distribution of fish stocks, rather than historical data.

Sitting at the heart of the white paper will be the UK government's commitment to sustainable fisheries, including ending the wasteful discarding of fish and making clear vessels will only be allowed to fish in our waters if they adhere to our high sustainability standards.

The paper will also commit to publishing an annual statement setting out the health of fish stocks and based on the latest scientific evidence. If stocks are struggling, the four UK fisheries Administrations will work together to put in place a comprehensive recovery plan to restore them to healthy levels.

Likewise, the paper will outline a new approach to tackling 'choke species' – one of the biggest challenges facing the fishing sector and which occurs when fishermen have used up their quota for a specific stock. As fishermen cannot target a certain area for risk of accidentally catching the exhausted stock, they either have to stop fishing or risk breaking the law if they land the extra stock.

The white paper will propose two new approaches in England: a reserve of quota that could be used to offset choke species, coupled with a new scheme to help fishermen unable to find quota to set against their catch.

And, as set out in its 25 Year Environment Plan, the government will pursue an ecosystem approach to fisheries management that will minimise impacts on non-commercial species and the marine environment.

Barrie Deas, CEO of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation, said:

Today the Government has presented a broad vision for post-Brexit fisheries that is clear and cogent – and importantly, is aligned with international law. I am sure that it will attract wide support across the industry and Parliament.

Outside the EU, the UK will be an independent coastal state and

this will provide the basis to rebalance quota shares and implement effective and adaptive management measures for our fisheries.

We are pleased a partnership with the fishing industry is at the heart of the Government's approach. There is much to do and we look forward to working within this framework of cooperation.

Scottish Fishermen's Federation Chief Executive Bertie Armstrong said:

The white paper enshrines the important elements that we have been arguing for to forge a sustainable future for our industry: allowing the UK to become an independent coastal state, to take charge of who catches what where and to resist any and all attempts to link access to our waters to access to EU markets.

Of course, there is a long way to go, and we now need our governments to show real backbone in the Brexit negotiations to ensure that these aspirations become reality.

Our approach will benefit the whole of the UK. The UK government will continue to work with the Devolved Administrations to develop a new UK framework for fisheries management, which will maximise their power to manage their fisheries while maintaining the overall coherence of the UK's approach. It will also ensure compliance with international obligations to manage our shared resources sustainably.

We do not yet know the outcome of the UK's negotiations to withdraw from the EU or on a future economic partnership, and the white paper will be clear that market access for fisheries products is separate to the question of fishing opportunities and access to waters. Access to waters and fishing opportunities will be negotiated on an annual basis. This is consistent with the approach to fisheries taken by other coastal states including Norway.

Interested parties will now be invited to share their views on proposals outlined in the white paper during a 10 week consultation.