

Fishing for wins

As the government battles the virus we need more wins and optimism elsewhere. We need to get on with the great Brexit wins now we are free to set our own laws and taxes.

This is now crucial for our fishing industry who feel let down. There is scope for major growth in investment and jobs. The immediate task is to protect our fish stocks from plunder by aggressive foreign industrial trawlers, and to help the UK build capacity to fish the grounds in a sustainable way landing much more fish here in the UK. This requires

1. A ban on super large industrial trawlers. The Agriculture Department says there is no definition of a supertrawler . There can be. You could ban all boats of over 100 metres in length, or all boats of over 5000 deadweight tonnes. This would remove the huge Russian and Dutch vessels which dominate and leave more fish for our smaller boats. This would be very popular, and supported by Green groups.
2. Cheap loan and grant schemes to build new under 100m boats for our expanded fishery in UK yards, and a scheme to allow purchase of second hand vessels from abroad which can also increase capacity. With interest rates so low for the government it would be easy to offer soft loans with long repayment dates to get new fishing people involved.
3. Use available regional and development grant regimes to encourage harbour expansion around our coasts at suitable fishing locations.
4. Speed up Freeports and Enterprise Zones, allotting enough to fishing areas and use them to attract new and additional fish and food processing.
5. Help the UK fishing industry establish new markets for UK fish by adding value, using the fish in ready meals and frozen products, sending much more to fish hungry Asia.
6. For shipping generally, reverse the Factortame ECJ judgement, restoring a minimum UK ownership requirement for UK flagged vessels.
7. Draw up with our shipping industry improvements to requirements for the UK shipping Register to encourage expansion without diluting labour or safety standards.

My intervention during the Statement on the Police National Computer, 18 January 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I thank the Minister, the Home Secretary and the police leadership around the country for the very professional way

in which they have responded to a most unfortunate error, an error that none of them wanted or made personally. Will he give us a little bit more encouragement, however, because is it not the case that there are now many good ways to retrieve data that has been wrongly deleted? Might we be looking at a remedy for this in a few weeks' time, when the computer experts have finished their job?

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Mr Kit Malthouse): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the initial assessment was some optimism about the ability to recover this data, not least because it is held in a number of areas. We will not have the full picture until we get to the end of this week, once we have analysed the report and, of course, looked at the data that we should have deleted but have not because of this error. However, he is quite right that we should be optimistic about that and recognise that all is not lost. There are other ways that this data can be cross-checked, in particular as part of a police investigation. We are working with our policing partners to ensure that they make full use of that, so that they can proceed as usual with their investigations.

National free school meals voucher scheme opens to orders

I have been notified by the Government that the national free school meals voucher scheme has opened to orders. Schools can begin ordering free school meal vouchers for eligible pupils from today, adding to the support available for disadvantaged families.

An online service for schools, the scheme allows schools to place orders for supermarket gift cards on behalf of parents and carers whose children are eligible for free school meals.

The vouchers are worth £15 a week per child and families can receive codes by email to redeem themselves, or as a gift card provided by post, collection or delivery to families without internet access.

In addition to the national scheme, schools can continue providing free meals to eligible pupils via lunch parcels, through catering suppliers, or via locally arranged solutions. This might include vouchers for a local shop or supermarket not currently included in the national scheme.

The Department for Education continues to work with LACA, the body representing school caterers to ensure lunch parcels and meals all meet high standards. Guidance developed by LACA and Public Health England is being updated to reflect the additional funding that has been provided to support schools and school caterers in following this approach.

You can read more about the scheme at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme-opens-to-orders>

Universal credit

Yesterday I accepted the Prime Minister's advice and abstained on the Opposition day motion. I was in two minds about it and gave the government the benefit of the doubt.

On the one hand it is a perfectly fair tactic for the Opposition to table a motion to smoke out a government view on a contentious issue. I prefer it when the government has a view and then defends it with arguments and votes. It would be popular with many if the government just agreed to continue the new higher rate of benefit. On the other hand, I could see that the government wishes to make up its mind on whether to continue the extra £1000 a year Universal Credit to all recipients nearer the budget when it should have new forecasts of how likely it is people can get jobs to boost their incomes, and how the spending figures generally are placed.

The central idea of Universal credit is to ensure people are always better off working. Higher minimum wages, control of low wage migration, taking lower pay out of income tax are all part of a suite of policies to make it true that it is better to work, whilst ensuring all can afford to live from benefit payments if they are out of work. I was a strong supporter of the increase in UC when the pandemic hit with policies to control it that drove many lower paid out of work altogether, and slashed the overtime and performance related pay of others.

I fear we will need further support for families and small businesses before the pandemic is over and more normal life resumes. I will press for suitable measures in the run up to the budget. I am against the ideas I see in some parts of the media that from March the government needs to rein in spending and borrowing and push up taxes. That would be quite the wrong response when the economy is still limping along way below its levels of income and work of 2019.

Why are we waiting?

I read that the Chancellor has been charged with chairing a Committee to take advantage of the freedoms we gain from leaving the EU. I wish him well, as

there are many obvious easy wins which the government should have ready after four and half years delay in our exit. Why are we still waiting for them?

The Chancellor in particular should get on with a Brexit bonus budget. He should set out the large savings on our contributions to the EU and how they are being used. He should explain how the sums we will still be paying to farmers in lieu of the CAP payments will be better directed. I want to see more of that money promoting domestic food production. The EU often paid us grants to stop us producing things.

He should explain how he will police any residual bills from the EU under the Withdrawal Agreement and what action he will take to get our money back from the EIB and other joint assets we held with them.

I want him to overhaul VAT, an EU tax. He could begin by removing it from all green products, and from domestic fuel. That would promote higher standards of insulation, fuel efficiency and more modern controls, and reduce fuel poverty.

He should examine tax levels and grants for small business with a view to producing a better package. He needs to promote small business and self employment as we need them to power the recovery from the deep anti CV 19 recession we have been living through.

This is not the time to be increasing tax on the self employed through IR35, nor to be putting VAT onto foreign visitors who used to come here for duty free shopping amongst other reasons. We need a UK open for business and welcoming to visitors with money to spend.