

Yellowhammer – is that it?

The Yellowhammer document when released turned out to be thin and poorly researched.

A lot of it which went largely unreported was grudgingly reassuring. Our water supply will be fine. We will still have normal services for electricity and gas. Demand for energy will be met. There will of course be no overall shortage of food. There is a “low risk of significant sustained queues at ports outside of (sic) Kent”.

Perhaps the worst warning was that a large number of foreign vessels might still be fishing in our waters, and doubt is expressed about our ability to enforce the return of our fishery to UK control immediately. I think I have higher expectations of our coastal patrols and of the conduct of our neighbours than that, who should want to obey the new law.

The two worries the Remain press have concentrated on are the unproven suggestions that there could be shortages of some imported medicines and some imported foods owing to delays and congestion at Calais. At no point does the document suggest we will create delays at Dover, and the paper accepts that the UK is not going to impose delay inducing barriers and extensive checks at our border. Their worry about Calais, denied by the port authorities there, is that the new checks at Calais will defeat UK truckers seeking entry to France and will create queues. This in turn I suppose they think might delay the lorries going from Kent to the continent to pick up continental products to come back causing knock on effects on the Kent side. As many of our lorries go out empty this seems unlikely. Most of the full ones are run by large logistics companies or directly by large exporting companies who will I am sure be able to complete the electronic documentation in advance of travel to meet the requirements. That is what they are paid to do, and what they do for non EU trade today.

I was talking to a food importer this week who is looking at taking more product for the north via Immingham, discovering it is quicker and cheaper than the Dover/Calais route. Some will do this, and more would do so if problems did start to emerge at Calais.

This worst case wrongly assumes markets stop functioning. Logistics is very competitive. There are many options. During our years in the EU the Calais/Dover route has sometimes been troubled by strikes, ferry and train delays or cancellations, crashes and congestion on the motorway networks either side of the channel, but we have never run out of food or medicines. If a complex supply chain is disrupted by French strikes you choose a new sea route or resort to air freight to see you through. Yellowhammer implies Dover is fine, subject only to too many Calais delays caused by UK trucks not complying with standard customs and shipment filings. It is difficult to see why this should happen, as it would be bad logistics business to do that. There would also be plenty of other options for frustrated customers if they tried it.