

# UK commmits to keeping trade, fishing rights separate in Brexit negotiations

By [Neil Ramsden](#) July 5, 2018 10:28 GMT



 Scottish fisherman with North Sea cod. Credit: MSC

The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has set out its stall alongside the fisheries sector in stating market access will be kept separate to the question of fishing opportunities during Brexit negotiations.

"Access to markets for fisheries products will be agreed as part of our future economic partnership, just as with other goods and food products," it stated in

its white paper on future fisheries policy.

"This is separate to the question of fishing opportunities and access to waters, which consequently will be addressed separately, founded on the UK's legal status as an independent coastal state."

In justification, it said this was consistent with fisheries agreements internationally, and with EU-third country precedents. "Both the EU and UK have an interest in continued trade for the fisheries and wider seafood sector."

The separation of trade and production as negotiating tools have been key to the UK as Brexit negotiations continue, but the likelihood of said separation as unclear.

Speaking at the Norway-UK seafood summit in [January 2018](#), fisheries economist and CEO of Sakana Consultants, Sebastien Metz, warned he did not think the UK sector would get its wish.

"Trade and production won't be kept separate. Norway tried to do the same thing when it negotiated with the EU, and couldn't."

He thought a "status quo" situation is more likely than dramatic change, in terms of both trade and fishing; "fisheries negotiations are not a big deal, in terms of the full Brexit negotiation".

Speaking to *Undercurrent News* on July 4, Metz said he still views things the same way.

"From what I read recently, the EU is still pushing for linking trade and fishing rights in the same discussion. The main question now is about who blinks first; which side will make concessions on that first."

"I suspect the UK tactic has been to delay the negotiations to avoid sectoral discussions and force high-level discussions. From my perspective, it's the only possibility they have to disjoint trade and fishing rights."

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) [has insisted](#) it would be logical for the UK's split from the EU to deal with quota shares and trade separately.

Citing the example of Norway -- which maintains access to the EU single market under specific agreed arrangements, but manages the fisheries within its own exclusive economic zone and enters into annual agreements on the management shared stocks and quota exchanges as an independent coastal state -- NFFO said the separation was the only logical way of handling the talks when the UK's legal status on fisheries changes on March 29, 2019.

However, speaking in February 2018, NFFO said, "if the UK accepts that fishing should be part of a 21-month transitional period on the terms specified by the

EU (status quo on access and quota shares), it will be because it has again, as in 1973, decided that fishing is expendable and that other, trade issues take priority, despite its new legal status as an independent coastal state." The UK then agreed to said implementation period, leading to the Conservative party and the Scottish industry decrying a "betrayal".

Once the principle that the status quo on quota shares and access has been conceded for a transitional deal, "it is patently obvious that the EU will use the same tactics and leverage when the UK seeks to negotiate a long-term trade deal with the EU", NFFO warned before the implementation deal. "Fishing will again be a sacrificed pawn, irrespective of its legal status as an independent coastal state."

It is this sort of language the UK government presumably hopes to avoid with the release of its white paper, which has indeed been well-received by fishing bodies.

Defra, on July 4, stated the UK remained fully committed to meeting its obligations under a number of environmental and international organizations, including the World Trade Organisation (WTO) -- "and will reinvigorate our role in these organizations".

"By doing this we will maintain trade with other countries and develop a full relationship with the international bodies and committees that oversee control of fisheries and the marine environment. We will also continue to work actively through informal agreements and partnerships such as the UN Clean Seas Campaign and the Global Ghost Gear Initiative."

WTO rules set the framework for bilateral trade negotiations, and the UK government is committed to seeking a "deep and special partnership" with the EU, it said.

This would encompass "the best possible deal for the seafood sector, including the shellfish, processing and aquaculture sectors, while ensuring that consumers continue to have a wide choice of high-quality food products at affordable prices".

It also said it was committed seeking continuity in current trade and investment relationships, including those covered by EU third-country free trade agreements and preferential arrangements, as well as to secure access to new markets globally.

Common frameworks will be established where they are necessary in order to ensure the UK can negotiate, enter into and implement new trade agreements and international treaties, it said.

"The UK seafood industry is dependent on international trade and we currently have a trade surplus with the EU. In order to maintain this, we need to use the most reliable possible methods of ensuring that the fish caught is

fully recorded and make sure that full data informs our management methods, helping to maintain access to EU markets and increase access for our exports to other overseas markets."

"We will also seek to control our borders to prevent global IUU [illegal, unregulated and unreported] catches from entering our supply chain, including through continued international cooperation."

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