



Fishing Policy – Executive Summary

(Updated 13 January 2011)

Fishing has been a key sector of the Scottish economy for many centuries, even for thousands of years. It is therefore a lifeblood political issue that the Scottish Democratic Alliance regards with appropriate seriousness. During those centuries the Scottish fishing industry harvested the seas while maintaining healthy fish stocks in balance with the rate of exploitation. Fishing was not a UK function. Fishing was controlled by the Scottish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and it was policed by the Scottish fisheries protection fleet. On 1 January 1973 this all changed with the start of control from Brussels, a move that resulted in an economic, environmental, ecological, social and cultural disaster.

The direct results for Scotland have included tens of thousands of job losses in the marine and downstream sectors of the industry, and an annual loss of wealth creation of the order of £1,500 million every single year. The fleet of offshore boats has been reduced by two thirds. In the pelagic sector alone, where in earlier years 1,000 herring boats employed 10,000 seamen, the present fleet consists of two dozen large midwater boats crewed by 280 men. The larger demersal white fish fleet has been even harder hit by the EU intervention.

The SDA cannot conceive of any calculable benefits to Scotland of EU membership that could possibly compensate for this haemorrhage of Scotland's economic wealth. There is clearly no possibility of having this intolerable situation remedied from within the European Union, where incomprehension of Scotland's situation, integrationist ideology and acquisitive greed on the part of other member states will always prevent the necessary alteration of the four major EU treaties involved. The SDA proposes that Scotland should transfer from the EU side of the European Economic Area (EEA) to its EFTA side, which is not subject to the EU fisheries and agricultural policies, and has drawn up its scheme for the reorganisation of fisheries management in the light of this overarching policy.

Under a sovereign, independent government, the SDA proposes that a Scottish fishery policy will have the following objectives:

1. Asserting the Scottish Nation's right to its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and to the management of all fish stocks therein.
2. Rebuilding the indigenous fish stocks by a total ban on industrial fishing, on landing of immature fish, and on discarding of fish catches or by-catches at sea. Other measures that would help stock recovery include reducing marine pollution from industrial, urban and agricultural sources, including salmon fish farms, and putting a ceiling on any bloated seal population.
3. Working with the industry to replace the current tradable quota system with one similar to that of the Faeroe Isles, based instead on controls over fishing effort. This should be done in stages, beginning with the small-scale fleet, then the medium-scale vessels, and finally the pelagic fleet.
4. Involving the fishing industry as a full partner with the Scottish Government in all fishery management decisions and measures, along with NGOs and local government.
5. Encouraging the redevelopment of small local fishing ports by scrapping the designated ports rule, and by establishing local management regimes covering coastal waters.
6. Discouraging, and eventually abolishing, the aggregation of fishing licenses by non-fishers and by wealthy owners, who are then able to build larger and more powerful vessels, while encouraging low-impact economical fishing units that are more environmentally and socially suited to the inshore and coastal areas.
7. In consultation with the industry, determining for the long term the optimum number and size of the pelagic and deep-water fleets, which need to be of a given capacity to operate safely and profitably.
8. Establishing a Scottish Fishery Research Board, subject to peer review, and having leading fishers and environmentalists sit on that board.
9. Bringing all existing fishery patrol, fishery inspection, fishery training, marine inspection and fish quality control arrangements under the joint control of the fishing industry and the Scottish Government.
10. Promoting and ensuring the quality and reputation of Scottish fish, and developing markets as a member of the European Economic Area, which would ensure continued access to European markets as enjoyed at present by Norway, the Faeroe Isles and Iceland.

All of these proposals would be subject to full consultation with the Scottish fishers, who would vote on each measure and propose amendments as appropriate.