



BREXIT “A ONCE IN A CENTURY OPPORTUNITY” TO RESTORE FISH STOCKS

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Brexit gives the UK a ‘once in a hundred years opportunity’ to restore an immense bounty of fish and marine life to its seas not seen since Victorian times, two of the world’s leading marine scientists have said.

As Britain steps away from the European Fisheries Policy based on the idea of fish being a “shared resource” bold action enshrined in our own laws could quickly bring back fish stocks with huge benefit to both consumers and fishermen, they said.

Professor Daniel Pauly and Dr Dirk Zeller, marine biologists from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, spoke as he and his colleague were presented with an Ocean Award from the Blue Marine Foundation for their ground breaking research on world fish catches and before a prestigious Turing lecture at the Zoological Society of London.

Prof Pauly said Britain should pass a law similar to the Magnusson Stevens Act in the US which enshrines in statute the rebuilding of fish stocks within a fixed period of ten years.

“And you have to have to set your own quota which allows the stocks to rebuild. And if you had that law passed it would be job of the fisheries minister to ensure that it is done.

“At present the fisheries minister can interfere with Total Allowable Catches [catch limits] – that is the equivalent of a justice minister interfering in trials. They should have a law they have to respect themselves.”

Prof Pauly said Britain had been positive influence within the EU, a ‘friend of fish’ rather than a ‘friend of fishers,’ but now there was an opportunity to make things better.

“But you could make things worse because with every opportunity comes the opportunity to be stupid.” he said Prof Pauly said it was not generally realised that Britain had enjoyed an enormous bounty of sea life right up to the shoreline before the steam trawler and modern fishing began to take their toll from the mid-19th century.

“We have to get free of this assumption that fisheries are necessarily an international thing. It is true that European countries are relatively small compared to African countries but it is also that they have lots of stocks within their exclusive economic zone and these stocks can be managed solely by the national authorities.”

He said destructive trawling methods had recently been made even worse by pulse fishing – the electrification of nets to stimulate fish off the bottom.

“So you kill the animals that would slip under the net – every little shrimp and worm – you are literally scraping the bottom of the sea.”

“There must be spaces, call them marine reserves, where some of the fish can recuperate because big fish cannot withstand even a low fishing mortality. If you pass one time with a trawl, not even ten times as in some parts of the North Sea, it is enough to prevent the fish from ever becoming big.”

He said the UK will need to designate between 20 and 30 per cent of its own waters as Marine Reserves with no fishing of any kind allowed in them to enable stocks to re-build.

“Paradoxically, the fishers would not lose anything. They would improve the catch. In ten years they would see the results.

“At present, Britain is doing a good job on marine reserves in Pitcairn, Ascension and other parts of the world but has none in the core metropolitan area. This is a pity because the fish here would also react well to being given a break,” he said.

Prof Pauly said that rights to fish should be granted to small scale boats from British ports on the basis of “adjacency” or proximity to the fishing grounds.

“I believe very much that adjacency should be the first criterion of giving the privilege to fish. If you look at the energy expended to catch the stuff, the small fishers need less far less fuel per ton of fish caught. Why? Because of adjacency. They go out 15-20 miles and then come back.

“You have rural employment and rural communities doing fine. What’s the alternative, you impoverish an entire landscape? What are you going to do with the people who do not have jobs any more because they do not have anything to catch.”

Dr. Zeller said scientists had proved that fish stocks can recover quickly with the right measures in place. “The result would soon be more fish for the consumer to eat and

fishermen to catch nearer their home port which could re-generate your coastal towns, he said.”

Link: <http://www.blumarinefoundation.com/2017/01/18/brexit-century-opportunity-restore-fish-stocks/>