

A Fair Deal for Cornish Inshore Fishing Communities

Proposal

We, the constituency Labour parties of Cornwall, call on all Labour supporters throughout the county to campaign for a fair deal for local fishing communities. We believe that fisheries are a public resource, fishing sustainably should be the law, decisions regarding fisheries policy should be transparent, and fisheries subject to the highest environmental standards.

We resolve to campaign for fairer allocation of UK fishing quotas to small, inshore boats, and on behalf of 'small-boat' organisations such as the Coastal Producer Organisation, NUTFA and LIFE which seek to implement more ecologically-sustainable fishing methods, all of which will then bring wider social and economic benefits (more sustainable management of key local resources, increased employment opportunities in coastal communities especially for young people, and strong economic multiplier effects e.g. in tourism). We see this as a key way of showing that Labour is now not just a metropolitan party, and that we care for 'the many' small, coastal and other rural communities, not just for the urban 'few'.

Background

Small boats are treated unfairly. Coastal communities have long been blighted by poor management – by successive governments – of the UK share of fishing quotas under the EU Common Fisheries Policy. Since 'small' boats (i.e. <10 m in length) contribute 78% of the UK fishing workforce, it is grossly unfair they receive only 2% of the UK national fishing quota.

UK Government to blame, not the EU. Historically, blame for unfair allocation of UK fishing quotas – encouraged by UKIP, and several Cornwall Tory MPs – has been laid at the door of the EU, especially the Common Fisheries Policy. In fact, once the annual EU Total Allowable Catch is agreed each December, *national* quotas (UK, ca 100,000 tonnes) are then distributed internally *by member states themselves, and not by the EU as a whole*.

Allocation of only 2% of total allowable catch to inshore boats, along with 'discarding' (throwing fish back into the sea), are not so much a direct result of EU Common Fisheries Policy, as of the UK government's own creation of a market in fishing quotas.

Marketisation of quotas favours transnational corporations. UK fishing quotas are leased (by DEFRA) to the highest bidder. To access quota, small boat operators must join Producer Organisations, from which, historically, they were excluded. Leasing has led to commercialisation of quotas and their concentration in the hands of transnational corporations. A greater proportion of UK quota is owned by foreign businesses than of any other EU member state. Three companies (Andrew Marr Inc., Interfish, and the *Cornelius Vrolijk*, a Dutch factory ship) own over 66%. The *Cornelius Vrolijk* itself owns 23% of the English fishing quota – more than that of the entire Cornish fishing fleet.

Inshore fishing communities left behind. It is therefore not so much the EU Common Fisheries Policy, as the UK government's own marketisation of quotas which has depressed inshore fishing, increased unemployment in coastal fishing communities, and led many small boat operators to leave the trade, or to switch to fishing for 'non-quota' species (e.g. shellfish). Young people wishing to take up fishing as an occupation can no longer afford to bid for leases. All of these factors have led to deep distrust of the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy in UK fishing communities, of 'experts', and to a profound sense of being 'left behind'; hence the overwhelming Leave vote during the referendum from UK fishing communities.