

PRESS RELEASE BY E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Save Our Seals Fund, C/O
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Government Ministers at both Westminster and Holyrood have been asked to act now to protect the marine environment and fish stocks from the consequences of the UK leaving the EU. Marine protection charity Save Our Seals Fund is concerned that when we leave the EU there will be a fishing free for all in British waters and a return to the cod wars of the 1960s and 70s and the black fishing scandal of ten years ago. Ministers have been asked to act now to provide the ships, aircraft and extra staff our fishery protection service will need just 30 months from now.

John Robins, Secretary of Save Our Seals Fund (SOSF) said: "Unless the Westminster and Holyrood Governments act now we will not be able to protect our seas and fish stocks when we leave the EU and the conservation quota system which currently controls fishing throughout Europe. A decade ago large numbers of Scottish fishing boats killed billions of fish in the biggest environmental crime this country has ever seen. Once Britain is out of the EU quota system our waters will also be targeted by foreign vessels keen to profit from exploiting scarce fish stocks. Unless we greatly improve our fishery protection measures we might as well raise the white flag when trawlers flying the Jolly Roger sail up the Minch."

EDITORS NOTES: Our e-mail to the Ministers is copied below. Best numbers to get me on are 01389841111 or 07721605521.

Sunday, 03 July 2016

To:

Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

George Eustice MP, Minister of State for Farming, Food and the Marine Environment.

Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity.

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Dear Ministers Cunningham, Eustice, Ewing and Truss,

I am writing to you, the current Ministers at Holyrood and Westminster with responsibility for fisheries and conservation, to ask you to take urgent action to prepare for one of the biggest environmental problems Brexit is about to create.

As you will know the UK fishing industry was a powerful force in persuading voters to take the UK out of the EU. Fishery interests decried EU bureaucrats for using rules, regulations, red tape and conservation catch quotas to destroy British fisherman. Much was made of how many fewer trawlers are registered in the UK now compared to forty years ago when we joined what is now the EU. Like much of the Brexit campaign these arguments were little

more than very fishy fishermen's stories to be taken with a very large pinch of salt.

What was not mentioned by the protestors was the less than proud record of their flagship which sailed up the Thames to protest at Westminster. The Christina S was one of many trawlers involved in the black fish fraud which used sophisticated clandestine criminal methods to illegally land tens of thousands of tonnes of conservation quota-busting fish at Peterhead and Lerwick. Over 20 skippers were found guilty and fines totalling circa £10 million were levied in a series of court cases in 2011 and 2012. The fines were only a small fraction of the value of the fish landed illegally. Several of those prosecuted are multi-millionaires and still involved in commercial fishing.

As for the shrinking fishing fleet it should be noted that although the number of ocean going trawlers has reduced, the catch capability of the new generation of much larger ships is enormous, enabling individual boats to catch as many fish in a few weeks as their predecessors would land in a year. Indeed I believe the Christina S was too big to sail all the way to Westminster and had to berth in deeper water further down the Thames.

Representatives of the fishing industry are going to be heavily involved in lobbying you, or your successors in office, to ensure you reclaim British waters and British fish for British fishermen. I believe for you Mr. Ewing that lobbying starts with a meeting tomorrow (Monday) with fishermen who want to persuade the Scottish Government to drop attempts to try and keep Scotland within the EU.

Please remember that those of us who seek to protect the marine environment and the creatures which inhabit that environment are every bit as much stakeholders as those who profit from exploiting that environment and denuding it of life.

Rather than listening to fishy stories from an industry which nearly wiped-out North Sea fish stocks in the biggest environmental crime the UK has ever seen, I suggest all three of you get together as a matter of urgency to make plans for what seems our inevitable exit from the EU in circa two and a half years from now. When that happens the waters around our coast and the fish stocks which live in those waters will need more protection than ever before.

The black fish frauds proved our fishing industry cannot be trusted to respect the very necessary strict conservation measures required to protect fish stocks from extinction. In addition to threats from the domestic fishing industry there is every chance that, once we are out of the EU, British waters will be viewed as open for the taking by trawlers from the EU and beyond. We should prepare for a possible return to the cod wars of the 1950s to 1970s though this time the intruders might be coming from north, east and south as well as our home ports.

If we are going to have a fishery protection service which is fit for purpose you have about 30 months to build or buy the boats and aircraft we will need and to recruit and train the staff required.

Westminster and Holyrood need to create new legislation to ensure piscivorous pirates realise that penalties for poaching our waters are too big a price to pay.

Any skipper convicted of breaking conservation quotas or of fishing without proper permission should, in addition to any fines or prison sentence, automatically have his or her vessel confiscated. Confiscated boats could be converted for fishery protection purposes or stripped of pollutants and given to the Royal Navy and RAF for target practise and sunk to create artificial reefs providing safe breeding grounds for fish.

Please do not dismiss my request as being outlandish or unnecessary. I have just spent several months listening to senior politicians spouting unfounded and irrational reasons as to why we should stay in or leave the EU. My concerns are based on the history of the fishing industry. A history which includes the notorious cod wars and the more recent international shame brought upon Scotland by our own fishing industry in the 21st century.

Our marine environment is very fragile and, if you do not take steps to protect it now, it could soon be too late.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Save Our Seals Fund