

Extract of speech from Lord David Owen at a public meeting at the Holiday Inn, Plymouth, Friday 27 May 2016 in support of Vote Leave.

I began my political career speaking in Appledore in the summer of 1962. The issue then was, at a cross party meeting, how to rally support in Whitehall and Westminster to save the Shipyard. The then Conservative MP, Sir Percy Browne, was a tower of strength and I learned an important lesson: not all of politics is partisan. There is now in this referendum as there was in 1975 a chance to cooperate across political differences and here on this platform to work with the elected West Country MEP, Lord Dartmouth.

Only recently in February 2016 that same issue of Appledore shipyard's forward work programme returned when the present ship being built for the Irish navy is finished. Next year there is as yet no new build. Let us hope that gap is filled. Already a third of the workforce have been transferred to Devonport here in Plymouth made easier because Babcock fortunately owns both yards.

Appledore was once a thriving fishing port. The last fishing boat, the Hannah Marie, was sold six weeks ago to be shipped to Denmark. According to the North Devon Fisherman's Association Chief Executive, Tony Rutherford, on the number of fishing boats "There were about 80 to 100 in these parts in 2002. Not one English boat here now." The Bristol Channel is ray fishing. Milford Haven is still fishing for ray but in the main the boats are Belgian. Here in Plymouth our fishing fleet has had its ups and downs. Fortunately it is doing a lot better than many other traditional fishing ports around the UK where its industry could show a huge improvement if the fishing water map was to change after we vote to leave on 23 June.

I do not think people really realize how badly the fishing industry has been affected. Look at the UK and Norway. When we joined our fishing industries were similar. Today we are only about 10% whereas Norway has building yards for fishing vessels up to 85 meters, something we cannot do in the UK.

In 1973 there were 23,476 fishermen in the UK; by 2014 that had dropped to 11,845 fishermen, a reduction of over 50%. In 1975 landing of fish was 842,000 tonnes, in 2014 it was down to 451,000 - a decline of 47%. We tried to protect our fishing stock in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1988. But

in 1991 this was ruled as illegal and we had to pay very substantive damages to foreign companies for breaching EU law.

We have just recently seen the EU Commission, whose competence it is, give away to the Faroes and Iceland 20% of EU mackerel which equates to 20% of UK mackerel since we have the largest stock. That produces a loss to the UK economy of around £300 million every year. That stock given away without consultation could have quintupled Plymouth's largest and most successful fishing company.

The impossibility of making any progress in the EU on fishing was recognized by the Prime Minister who did not even attempt any renegotiation. The changes in British fishing after voting to leave will have to respect traditional fishing rights but the management will be entirely in British hands and our industry will soon start to thrive again.

If we leave the EU, some elements will change a lot, others will not change. Firstly, what would not change. The third tranche of Marine Conservation Zones, which are a national initiative, would go ahead as planned. We would still target Maximum Sustainable Yield because a profitable fishing industry for the future must fish sustainably. We would still have a quota system because, while quotas are not perfect, they are the only system that works in a shared fishery with mobile species. We would still strive to eliminate the wasteful practice of discarding dead fish back into the sea. But, international negotiation will always be crucial to effective fisheries management.

The big change is the UK would regain its voting rights and its voice on numerous Regional Fisheries Managements Organisations where it has been systematically undermined and replaced by the EU in recent years. We would be able to take a more assertive role in promoting sustainable fisheries on the world stage. The reason being we would no longer be hindered by common EU positions. Promoting shark conservation, reducing catches of Blue Fin Tuna and forcefully arguing for an end to whaling would all become much easier if we left the EU and regained our own voice in international fisheries and wildlife conventions. We would also regain our seat in crucial quota negotiations in the North Sea and we would be in a strong position to reopen the principle of "relative stability" so that our fishermen along the south coast and in the Celtic sea receive a fairer allocation of international quotas.

If we re-establish national control for 200 nautical miles or the median line as provided for in international law then we would also be in the strongest possible position to re-open the issue of so called “relative stability” and argue for a fairer share of quota allocations in many fish stocks. Unlocking some historic unfairness to the UK fleet especially in the Channel and the Celtic Sea in the far South West would be a priority. In the Celtic sea and surrounding areas, in 2015, the UK allocation of cod was just 834 tonnes compared to 5500 tonnes for France. For Plaice in the Channel, it was 1300 tonnes for the UK but 2600 tonnes for France. In the Eastern Channel which is important to our south coast fishermen, the UK receives 670 tonnes of Dover Sole but France receives 1875 tonnes.

Fishing, like farming, used to be self-sufficient. Today we are a net importer of both as the South West is finding to our cost.