

UK MEPs at loggerheads over fishing industry no-deal Brexit scenarios

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News

British MEPs Chris Davies and June Mummery have clashed bitterly over the prospect for the UK's fishing industry if Britain exits the EU on 31 October with no deal.



Photo credit: Press Association

Davies and Mummery were speaking in the wake of the release of the UK government's Operation Yellowhammer document, which sets out contingency planning and response to the most severe anticipated short-term disruption under a no-deal Brexit.

Under the Yellowhammer scenario, up to 282 EU and European Economic Area fishing vessels could illegally enter UK waters on day one after 31 October.

The widely-publicised document also warns of potential clashes if foreign fishing vessels enter British territorial waters on the day after the UK's departure.

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Both Davies and Mummery are members of Parliament's fisheries committee, which this week held a stormy hearing on Brexit.

Liberal MEP Davies, who chairs the committee, told this website: "Three years since negotiations started with the UK government, six months after Britain was supposed to leave the EU, and five weeks before Boris Johnson says he is prepared for the UK to crash out, and the European Commission has told us that chaos and conflict on the seas could take place with effect from November 1, and there is no certainty about anything."

He said, "It is certainty that is wanted by all fishermen, and the British government could make a difference for the better by announcing that no changes will take place for a year or more until other matters are settled. It is hugely irresponsible to leave things as they are."

But Brexit Party member Mummery strongly disagreed and told The Parliament Magazine she wanted to convey "the feeling of many people in the British fishing industry who feel they have been let down and ignored" during the UK's membership of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

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Chris Davies MEP

She says that the vast majority, about 90 percent in the sector, voted for the UK to leave the EU "and they look forward to the UK becoming an independent coastal state once more, governing its own fisheries, making its own legislation and managing its own fleet."

She thinks the EU is now "worried that Britain will reclaim its fishing waters through a no-deal Brexit."

She added that member states "had all seen the social and economic damage" brought to British towns like Lowestoft, Ramsgate, Shields and Fleetwood through the decline of fishing "and worry the same could happen in their country."

"The fact is much of their fishing prosperity was built at the expense of British coastal communities. And, despite desperate pleas, they have been happy to keep it that way."

She said, "But things are changing; 'no-deal' looms large and all of a sudden there is talk of a deal to be done. Well, British fishermen want a deal too."

“British fishermen want a deal where their country is not giving away 80 percent of its fishing opportunities to EU boats; a deal in which we can scrap poorly-formulated legislation, like the discards ban and a deal in which we can realise the real value of our natural resources and return opportunities and prospects to our coastal communities.”

“British fishermen want a deal too. British fishermen want a deal where their country is not giving away 80 percent of its fishing opportunities to EU boats” **June Mummery MEP**

She added, “These are the demands of an industry once more finding its voice and demands that the European Union must respect.”

The Operation Yellowhammer document covers 12 key areas of risk, including food and water supplies, healthcare services, trade in goods and transport systems.

Under the Yellowhammer scenario the UK government and devolved maritime agencies’ enforcement and response capabilities could be under pressure from competing demands.

A European Commission spokesman said, “In a ‘no-deal’ Brexit, access to UK waters will be governed by UK legislation in accordance with international law. UK vessels will no longer have automatic access to EU waters, and vice versa.”

“The EU has fully prepared for a no-deal scenario.”

Two contingency measures have been adopted, including one which would ensure that the EU is in a position to grant UK vessels access to EU waters until the end of 2019, on the condition that EU vessels are also granted reciprocal access to UK waters.

“This measure is based on the terms of 2019 fishing opportunities, as agreed in the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 17 and 18 December 2018,” the spokesman said.

“In a ‘no-deal’ Brexit, access to UK waters will be governed by UK legislation in accordance with international law. UK vessels will no longer have automatic access to EU waters, and vice versa” **European Commission spokesman**

The EU has also adjusted the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund - the second measure - to enable Member States to grant financial compensation to fishermen who have to cease their activities temporarily resulting from the loss of access to UK waters.

When asked about its preparedness for the fishing sector, a UK government spokesman said, “The government is aiming for a sevenfold increase in the coverage of patrol vessels and introducing a significant increase in aerial surveillance to assist it in the enforcement of new rules coming into effect after 1 November.”

“UK government departments are setting up 24-hour operational centres to co-ordinate responses to issues as they arise.”

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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