

UK Fishing Industry

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

I wish to start by paying tribute to Sean Hunter, a Brixham fisherman who sadly lost his life in the past week. He was deeply loved by his family and the whole community, and I know that the House will want to join me in sending our deepest condolences to his family.

I also pay tribute to the Fishermen's Mission, which does much to support fishermen, their families and our wider communities, and join other Members in paying tribute to the coastguard, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the National Coastwatch Institution and all the emergency services for their professionalism and courage. Most of all, however, I want to thank the fishers themselves, who do so much, in such challenging conditions, to put food on our plates and bring so much to our national and local economies. The value of the catch to the UK economy in 2016 was Â£936 million.

I am also delighted to say that Brixham has again been voted the No. 1 fishing port in the UK and lands the most valuable catch in England. In excess of Â£30 million has been sold through Brixham fish market in the last year, and that is providing jobs not just at sea but in the processing sector on land. We recognise the value of all those jobs.

I also pay tribute to the responsible actions of our fishers, who have done much in responding to scientific advice to improve the sustainability of many of our species. However, just as we expect our fishers to respond to that scientific advice and reduce the total allowable catch, in many cases, so I would ask the Minister to respond and recognise that we expect fairness when the scientific data shows we are fishing sustainably. In his negotiations, in which I wish him well, will he therefore look at the sole quotas in VIII and VIIe? There is a very strong case for their being increased further.

We need to look again at the value of the scientific evidence on which the quotas are based. In responding to the debate, will the Minister listen to the concerns of fishermen who are asking for greater access to fisheries science partnerships in co-operation with CEFAS? I am concerned to hear that too often these requests are turned down. For some years, the UK has agreed to adhere to the data collection framework, so it is of great concern to hear that the sprat stock, for example, is still described as "Data Deficient". In his response, will the Minister say what is going to happen about that in future?

Several colleagues have raised the issues of bass fisheries. As time is short, I will not dwell on them, except perhaps to thank the Devon and Severn inshore fisheries and conservation authority for meeting me to discuss the wrasse fisheries, and to hold that up as an example of where responsible but proportionate precautionary principles are being applied.

In my closing moments, I say to the Minister that as we now move to thinking about where we are with Brexit and beyond, fishing communities want to see fairness. We recognise that we need to avoid falling into an acrimonious Brexit, but to maintain good relations in order to trade with our neighbours in the future. I just hope that he will make sure that our fishing

communities are not let down, as they were in 1973.

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