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THE PRIME MINISTER

28 November 2018

Dear All

Thank you for your letter of 14 November 2018. You have been very clear since entering Parliament how important it is that Scotland's iconic fishing industry is no longer constrained by the Common Fisheries Policy. I completely agree, which is why when we leave the EU, the UK will be an independent coastal state with full control over our waters. We will decide who can fish in our waters and on what terms.

The Political Declaration acknowledges that this will be the UK's new position, and that this fact must be the basis for any future agreement between the UK and EU on fishing opportunities.

The Political Declaration also makes clear that our intention is to have concluded a Fisheries Agreement with the EU by 1 July 2020. It has always been the EU's position that there should be a link between access to waters and access to markets as part of these arrangements – but they failed to achieve this in both the Political Declaration and the Withdrawal Agreement. It remains our resolute position that there should be no such link. If we cannot reach a new and fair agreement by the end of 2020 then the default is that EU vessels would have no access to our waters, so they have a strong incentive to reach one.

The UK's position remains that the Fisheries Agreement will set a framework to manage annual negotiations on access to waters and fishing opportunities, consistent with other coastal states who share stocks with the EU, such as Norway. Under these arrangements, the UK would negotiate access to waters and fishing opportunities for 2021 and subsequent years bilaterally with the EU, as a third country and independent coastal state. This will allow us to secure a fair share of fishing opportunities for UK fishermen, including Scottish fishermen. It will be a radical departure from the unfairness of the Common Fisheries Policy.

During the implementation period, we have accepted that the UK will continue to apply the rules of the CFP, including on the share of quota and on management measures. The relative stability key will continue to apply to protect our current rights during this period. While I recognise that this is not as soon as you would want, the agreement ensures that the UK can influence the setting of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) in 2019, and will be consulted in respect of the December Fisheries Council and international negotiations in 2019 to set fishing opportunities in 2020. In 2020 we will negotiate as a fully independent coastal state for fishing opportunities in 2021, as Norway does. If there is no fisheries agreement in place with the EU by then, of course, no EU country's fishing fleet will have access to our waters.

We are committed to ensuring that the future relationship is in place before the end of 2020. This commitment is set out in Article 184 of the Withdrawal Agreement, which includes a legally binding obligation that both the UK and the EU must use best endeavours to ensure that this is the case. This is reaffirmed in the Political Declaration.

While there is an option to extend the implementation period for a time limited period, as I have said many times, I do not want to extend the implementation period and I do not believe we will need to do so. This is an insurance policy that would only apply in the unlikely event that it takes longer to secure a future relationship than planned. However, in that unlikely event that we are not ready to enter the future relationship by the beginning of 2021 then the UK would face a sovereign choice. We could either seek to extend the implementation period or we could enter into the backstop arrangements which make clear that the UK would have left the CFP. I know and respect that your position, and that of the fishing industry, is that any situation that saw the UK in the CFP beyond 2020 would be unacceptable.

While the SNP would betray Scotland's fishermen by locking them into the CFP in perpetuity, it is only the Conservative and Unionist Party that will get the best deal for our fishing sector and ensure the future relationship will come into force at the end of 2020.

Yours ever
David