# British fishermen condemn UK-EU deal allowing EU access to waters until 2038



The recent agreement between the UK and the European Union has stirred an outcry among British fishermen after it was announced that EU vessels will continue to access UK waters until 2038. Critics, including prominent Brexiteers like Sir Iain Duncan Smith, have expressed their discontent, suggesting that the deal represents a capitulation to EU demands and undermines the sovereignty that many believed would be enhanced post-Brexit. Sir Iain claimed, “It’s a disaster for the British fishing fleet. The French are laughing their heads off,” reflecting a widespread sentiment among those in the industry who feel betrayed by the terms of the negotiation.

This deal emerged from a larger summit aimed at rekindling UK-EU relations after Brexit, where discussions also included trade, security, and mobility. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the stability the arrangement is intended to bring. However, the focus on fishing rights has overshadowed these other agreements, particularly as many fishermen feel their voices have not been adequately represented in this process. Jerry Percy from the New Under Ten Fishermen’s Association captured this sentiment succinctly: “We are, to be blunt, always used to getting screwed.”

The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations echoed this frustration, suggesting that the British government “lost its nerve” in negotiations. By agreeing to allow ongoing EU access to what are viewed as rich fishing grounds, critics argue that the UK has missed a vital opportunity to foster sustainable growth within its own fishing sector. Reform UK deputy leader Richard Tice went so far as to declare, “When Reform win the next general election we plan to ditch this dreadful surrender,” suggesting a pushback against what many consider to be an unacceptable concession.

In counterbalance, a Labour spokesperson dismissed the criticism, asserting that the deal maintains the same Brexit freedoms celebrated by the Conservative Party in 2021. They highlighted that access to fishing rights was consistent with previous agreements and aimed at sustaining the economic vibrancy of Britain’s coastal communities. However, this response has done little to quell the anger within the fishing industry. Industry leaders have expressed that the new terms represent a "horror show," drawing attention to a complex web of anger and resignation among fishermen facing an uncertain future.

The concerns surrounding this renewed access point to broader worries about Britain's post-Brexit trajectory. Opposition figures and some industry advocates fear that the sacrifices made in the fishing sector may serve as a precedent for other areas, leading to future compromises in trade and regulatory matters. As noted by analysts, the concessions around fishing rights will inadvertently reinforce perceptions of the UK as a "rule-taker" in negotiations where it previously sought greater autonomy.

While the government's narrative paints the new fishing arrangements as part of a pragmatic approach to rebuild ties with the EU, the reality on the ground tells a different story. Fishermen, the very individuals whose livelihoods are affected by these decisions, feel increasingly alienated in a process that prioritises broader economic and diplomatic stability over immediate, on-the-ground realities.

As the focus now shifts towards potential repercussions of this deal, it is clear that the aftermath of these negotiations will linger, shaping not only the future of the fishing industry but also the ongoing dialogue around the principles of sovereignty and autonomy post-Brexit. Whether this agreement will ultimately benefit the UK economy as touted remains to be seen, but for now, the mood among those directly impacted is one of disappointment and disillusionment.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059768/fishermens-verdict-eu-deal-french), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/47adc80f-ab03-49a1-9f7e-1a5962e71b83)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059768/fishermens-verdict-eu-deal-french), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/3181228316c3d0cd736ecbf93a1eff43)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059768/fishermens-verdict-eu-deal-french), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/hold-britain-poised-reset-trade-defence-ties-with-eu-2025-05-18/), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059768/fishermens-verdict-eu-deal-french), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/36f02ca9-9692-49e2-b84a-17cf86fc1062)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/47adc80f-ab03-49a1-9f7e-1a5962e71b83), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/3181228316c3d0cd736ecbf93a1eff43)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059768/fishermens-verdict-eu-deal-french> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/47adc80f-ab03-49a1-9f7e-1a5962e71b83> - The UK and EU have agreed to a 12-year fisheries deal, allowing EU fishing vessels continued access to UK waters until 2038. This agreement was announced during a London summit where Prime Minister Keir Starmer and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also unveiled accords on defense, security, trade, and mobility. The fisheries deal is based on historic catches and aims to provide stability for both parties. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/47adc80f-ab03-49a1-9f7e-1a5962e71b83?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/36f02ca9-9692-49e2-b84a-17cf86fc1062> - Rupert Rogers addresses criticism of the EU-UK agreement extending EU fishing fleets' access to UK waters for an additional 12 years. He references historical precedents, such as the 1964 London Fisheries Convention and a 1666 grant by Charles II, to justify such access. Rogers argues that, in the context of these longstanding arrangements, a 12-year extension is minor and consistent with past practices of shared use of maritime resources. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/36f02ca9-9692-49e2-b84a-17cf86fc1062?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://apnews.com/article/3181228316c3d0cd736ecbf93a1eff43> - Five years after Brexit, the UK and EU have signed new agreements marking a renewed chapter in bilateral relations. During the first formal summit since the UK's departure from the EU, Prime Minister Keir Starmer and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen celebrated deals focused on trade, defense, and youth mobility. Key developments include easing trade barriers by cutting border checks and aligning food standards, which aim to revive crimped exports and benefit the UK economy. A defense pact allows UK access to a €150 billion EU loan program for military procurement, partly to support Ukraine. Other agreements involve extending EU fishing rights in UK waters until 2038, enhanced youth mobility for temporary work and study exchanges, and expedited airport procedures for UK travelers via EU e-gates. While the British government touts the deals as economically and diplomatically beneficial, opposition parties criticize them as undermining Brexit, with complaints of becoming a “rule-taker” again. Starmer maintains the UK will not rejoin the single market or customs union. Analysts suggest a pragmatic approach to EU alignment is necessary given the UK’s trade dependencies. The agreements follow recent UK deals with the US and India, aiming to re-establish the UK’s global presence. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/3181228316c3d0cd736ecbf93a1eff43?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/hold-britain-poised-reset-trade-defence-ties-with-eu-2025-05-18/> - On May 19, 2025, the UK and the EU reached a landmark agreement to reset trade and defence relations, marking the most significant development since Brexit. The deal includes a new security and defence pact, reduced trade barriers for UK food exporters, eased travel for UK citizens, and a 12-year mutual fishing arrangement. Prompted by global instability and shifts in U.S. foreign policy under President Trump, the agreement signals a move towards European unity and cooperation. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, a pro-remain advocate, emphasized the economic benefits, including an anticipated £9 billion boost by 2040 and reduced food prices. The deal paves the way for UK participation in major EU defence procurements and potential reintegration into Erasmus+. Critics, including Nigel Farage and the Conservative Party, denounced the concessions, particularly in fishing rights. While this agreement stops short of rejoining the EU single market, it addresses post-Brexit economic challenges, aiming to renew business confidence and improve UK-EU relations without fully reversing Brexit. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/hold-britain-poised-reset-trade-defence-ties-with-eu-2025-05-18/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb> - Nine years after the Brexit referendum, the UK’s new agreement with the EU under the Labour government marks a modest but symbolically significant step towards closer cooperation. The centerpiece is a security and defence pact that formalizes collaboration in military training, cyber and space security, infrastructure resilience, and hybrid threats. This agreement also opens the door for UK participation in the EU's €150bn Security Action for Europe procurement fund. Economically, the deal includes a veterinary agreement to ease agrifood exports and aligns emissions trading systems, potentially adding £9bn to the UK economy by 2040. However, the UK has accepted dynamic alignment with EU rules in certain areas and extended EU fishing access to UK waters for 12 years, prompting criticism from rightwing parties as a loss of sovereignty and a betrayal of the fishing industry. While the Labour government has maintained red lines against rejoining the single market or customs union, the deal reflects a shift towards more pragmatic relations. With Europe facing rising security challenges, the agreement serves as a foundation for a deeper realignment, recognizing the UK's need to foster stronger ties with its principal trade and security partner. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/> - Britain’s food industry has largely welcomed a new agreement with the European Union that significantly reduces border paperwork and checks for trade in plant and animal products. This move is expected to ease trade and reduce costs while maintaining high food standards. Since the UK left the EU’s single market in 2021, exporters had faced significant delays and rising costs, leading to a one-third drop in UK food and drink exports to the EU. Retailers and small import businesses anticipate improved operations, with some European producers likely to resume trading with the UK. However, the deal came at a cost—Britain granted EU fishing vessels continued access to UK waters for 12 years. This concession has been met with anger from the UK fishing community, with industry leaders calling it a betrayal. While the food and retail sectors expressed relief and optimism, leaders like Elspeth Macdonald of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation condemned the fishing terms as a "horror show." Overall, the agreement represents a significant shift in UK-EU relations, balancing eased trade barriers with contentious compromises. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/?utm_source=openai))