# Scottish fishermen decry UK-EU trade deal as betrayal amid fears of dwindling waters



Steering his fishing boat towards Wick, Andrew Bremner's mood darkened despite the sunlight sparkling on the tranquil waters of the Pentland Firth. He and his ten-man crew had just completed a successful 16-day mission, catching cod, haddock, and whiting. Yet, for those whose livelihoods rely on the sea, joy felt elusive upon their return. Communities along Scotland's rugged coastline are reeling from a recent trade deal between the UK and the European Union, which, as Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer hailed, is intended to support British businesses and jobs. However, fishermen like Bremner feel betrayed, grappling with the stark reality of being sidelined in negotiations.

Bremner labelled the deal as a ‘betrayal,’ informing that he first learned about it through social media. With a consensus among many local fishermen, it is clear that they believe their concerns have been ignored. The agreement, described as the first significant post-Brexit ‘reset’ of relations between the UK and EU, encompasses a range of issues from trade to fisheries, a point of contention that has always sparked fierce debate. Central to the deal is the extension of access for EU fishing boats to British waters for an additional 12 years, a concession that many Scottish fishermen deem inadequate in return for the minimal benefits they perceive.

Despite Government assurances that this deal facilitates smoother food and drink imports and exports by reducing administrative burdens, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) condemned the terms as ‘disastrous.’ This sentiment resonates strongly within the fishing industry, which employed 4,000 individuals in Scotland and contributed £335 million to the economy in 2022. Meanwhile, the fish farming and aquaculture sectors contrasted this stance with optimism, as they anticipate reduced bureaucratic barriers enhancing their business operations.

Such divergent perspectives reflect a broader rift within the fishing community. While larger fish farms may welcome the cutting of post-Brexit red tape, those fishing crews, like Bremner’s, fear that their traditional fishing grounds will be overrun by foreign trawlers, driven out by economic competition and systemic disregard for their concerns. As the spectre of another "cod war" looms large, the industry grapples with an influx of EU vessels further reaching into UK waters, raising fears about the long-term sustainability of local fisheries.

Echoing this sentiment, James Anderson from the Shetland Fishermen’s Association recounted experiences of harassment from foreign vessels, stressing the historical context of distrust between fishermen and politicians. Edward Heath’s government once deemed fishermen as ‘expendable’ in the broader economic interests of the country, and today, many labour under the same impression. Their frustrations are deepened by historical precedents of neglect and broken promises, with the current deal perceived as another act of capitulation by the UK government.

Adding to these challenges, the environmental factors cannot be overlooked. As concerns grow about overfishing and the effect of climate change on marine ecosystems, the SFF called for improved sustainability measures. In recent discussions surrounding the increased offshore wind capacity, the industry is left worrying about the potential for diminished fishing zones and the neglect of their interests in the transition towards renewable energy.

Despite the UK government's announcement of a £360 million fund aimed at modernising coastal fishing operations and communities, many in the fishing sector feel this funding is a hollow promise. Rejuvenating old vessels through a ‘scrap and build’ programme has been suggested as a more effective use of resources. Without a clear strategy that protects local interests, the momentum built from public funds could be wasted.

Political tensions are rife, with parties like Reform UK keen to capitalise on the disillusionment within the fishing community, echoing Bremner's sentiments of betrayal. Analysts suggest that electoral outcomes may hinge on these developments, yet scepticism abounds.

In an industry marked by deep divides over market conditions, the implications of the latest trade deal may continue to spiral. As fishermen like Bremner, Anderson, and Philp navigate these tumultuous waters of policy, competition, and environmental stewardship, their resilience is tested as they strive to maintain their beloved tradition of fishing.

The very future of Scotland's coastal communities hinges on a delicate balance between securing fish stocks, ensuring sustainable practices, and navigating the waters of political commitment, against a backdrop of growing uncertainty.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744393/Fishermen-pushed-brink-cod-war-destroy-livelihoods.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744393/Fishermen-pushed-brink-cod-war-destroy-livelihoods.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/7e7f481e-92dd-4d95-b46e-1d6adb911b70), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/78f17b34-996d-4003-b031-4800f4e16918)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y84qlngg4o), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/increased-fishing-opportunities-worth-750-million-agreed-for-2023)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/78f17b34-996d-4003-b031-4800f4e16918), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y84qlngg4o)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y84qlngg4o)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/7e7f481e-92dd-4d95-b46e-1d6adb911b70), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-food-sellers-welcome-eu-deal-fishermen-feel-betrayed-2025-05-19/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744393/Fishermen-pushed-brink-cod-war-destroy-livelihoods.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0> - The Financial Times' 'Political Fix' podcast discusses Labour leader Keir Starmer's post-Brexit EU deal and its political implications. The deal re-establishes trade and diplomatic ties, including a defense partnership and restored electricity market cooperation. A veterinary agreement easing food trade and a contentious 12-year fisheries access compromise are key elements. While Starmer markets the deal as economical and pragmatic, critics like Kemi Badenoch label it a surrender due to dynamic alignment with EU rules. Public and political response has been muted, reflecting Brexit fatigue, though concerns about sovereignty and immigration persist.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/7e7f481e-92dd-4d95-b46e-1d6adb911b70> - The UK and EU have announced a reset of their post-Brexit relationship through a three-part agreement aimed at improving economic ties, security cooperation, and energy integration. Key components include a new security and defence partnership, improved trade in agrifoods and electricity, and a veterinary agreement reducing red tape on agricultural exports. While Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer claims a potential £9bn annual economic boost by 2040, analysts note the gains would only marginally offset Brexit’s 4% long-term GDP impact. The agreement includes a controversial 12-year extension of EU fishing access to UK waters, a trade-off for securing improvements in food trade. The UK will also work towards rejoining the EU's internal energy market, which could save consumers €44bn annually. The security pact reestablishes institutional cooperation, including regular high-level meetings and potential UK involvement in the EU’s €150bn arms fund. Gains in youth and professional mobility remain uncertain, with limited commitments on work exchanges and no progress on touring artist visas. Despite some economic and diplomatic progress, the reset does not reverse the fundamental Brexit trade and regulatory realignments.
4. <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.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/78f17b34-996d-4003-b031-4800f4e16918> - At a landmark summit in London, the UK and EU have agreed on a significant post-Brexit reset of their relationship, which UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer claims could bring £9bn in economic benefits. Central to the deal is the UK's concession to allow EU fishing access for an additional 12 years in exchange for streamlined trade in food and energy, a defence and security pact, and the reduction of regulatory barriers. The deal also proposes aligning UK food standards with the EU and easing trade with Northern Ireland. While EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed the agreement as 'historic', critics, including Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and Reform UK's Nigel Farage, argued that the UK had surrendered key interests, especially in fisheries. In response to concerns, the UK pledged £360mn to support coastal fishing and tourism. Although the fishing industry represents a small fraction of the UK economy, the agreement is expected to boost more significant sectors, such as agri-food exports. The summit also discussed future cooperation on youth mobility and a potential return to the Erasmus programme, though only tentative commitments were made. A communiqué promising deeper economic collaboration and potential defence funding access was also signed.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y84qlngg4o> - Scotland's fishing sector is at risk of being 'crushed' unless governments radically rethink their approach, an industry group has warned. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) has announced a series of concerns it says could put the jobs of hundreds of skippers and crew in jeopardy. The organisation said it was concerned about the expansion of offshore wind power, a lack of compensation for the industry and a resetting of relationships with the EU. Both the UK and Scottish governments have said they understand the challenges and are committed to supporting the industry. But SFF chief executive Elspeth Macdonald said the fishing sector must not become a casualty of the transition to green energy. She said: 'All our futures depend on shifting from an energy system based on fossil fuels to one that has less impact on global climate. But the 'windrush' – the planned expansion of offshore wind in our seas – floating offshore wind in particular – going ever-further and faster, is not proving to be a just transition for our fishing industry. We call on governments to step up to their responsibilities and live up to their commitments of a just transition – hollow words are not enough.'
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/increased-fishing-opportunities-worth-750-million-agreed-for-2023> - The UK fishing industry will benefit from increased fishing opportunities in 2023 as the latest round of negotiations conclude. The UK and EU agreed catch levels for 69 important fish stocks, including North Sea Nephrops (£54m), Anglerfish (£31m), and Western hake (£25m). The Scottish industry will benefit from improved catch levels for North Sea stocks including cod, hake, whiting, and nephrops. The agreement also commits the UK and EU to work together to provide more sustainable fisheries management.