# UK fishing industry clashes with government over extended EU access deal



Preparing the nets aboard the Amethyst trawler in Brixham harbour, Wesley Loveland embodies the frustration of many in the UK fishing industry regarding the latest deal between the UK and the European Union. “It’s a disaster,” Loveland declares, expressing his discontent over what he perceives as a betrayal of British fishermen for the sake of more trivial negotiations, like access to pet passports.

The new agreement, lauded by Prime Minister Keir Starmer as a “win-win” for both sides, aims to usher in a "new era" in UK-EU relations. It permits more British travellers to use e-gates when travelling to Europe and streamlines access for farmers to trade their products on the continent. Yet, amidst these advances lies a contentious element: European fishing trawlers have been granted an extension of 12 years to access British waters, a move that has triggered outrage across the fishing communities.

Loveland, who primarily catches Dover sole, believes that the government squandered an opportunity to negotiate tougher terms for UK fishers. “The fish in these waters are worth billions to the French and others,” says Loveland, suggesting that the industry could have provided significant leverage in discussions on immigration or other vital issues. He recalls the divisive atmosphere reminiscent of the Brexit turmoil. “When Brexit was going through, it was stressful… it’s really divisive,” he notes, revealing the emotional toll on those who have worked in this industry for years.

On the flip side, the deal offers potential benefits for exports, with the government asserting that fish caught in British waters can now be sold to the EU without veterinary checks—an important cost-saving measure. Ian Perkes, a fish merchant with decades of experience in Brixham harbour, welcomes the prospect of reduced red tape, even as specifics of the implementation remain unclear. He voices concern over the dire state of fish exports since Brexit, which have plummeted by 20% due to new regulatory barriers that have suffocated trade. Perkes recounts the heartache of witnessing significant losses linked to strict border checks, citing experiences where simple errors led to the destruction of valuable consignments.

Despite the potential gains in trade, the fishing community remains sceptical. Paul Dyer, another veteran in the industry, articulated a prevailing sentiment of betrayal among fishermen, arguing that extending EU access means diminished income for local fishers. “They are all the same. Conservative. Labour. It doesn’t matter,” he remarks, highlighting a pervasive disenchantment with political promises.

Kyle Evans, a long-time fisherman, added to this pessimism, feeling that the deal merely represents “business as usual.” He sensed that political manoeuvring was simply generating sensational stories rather than delivering meaningful change for his industry. This despair is echoed across the sector, reflecting a sense of abandonment amid attempts to balance broader economic interests with local needs.

Critically, while parts of the food industry have celebrated the alleviation of bureaucratic hassles, voices like Elspeth Macdonald from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation have described the fishing terms as a “horror show.” Ultimately, the agreement, while framed as a step towards renewed cooperation, illustrates the complex tensions inherent in negotiating post-Brexit relations. It cleverly navigates the fine line between economic pragmatism and the safeguarding of national interests, though not without significant backlash from those directly affected.

As the dust settles from this latest agreement, the fishing industry is left grappling with a precarious future, caught between the aspirations of a government seeking to improve trade relations and the stark realities confronting local fishermen who feel their voices have been drowned out in the tumult of political compromise.

### Reference Map

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/20/its-a-disaster-uk-fishers-angered-by-latest-uk-eu-deal> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <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.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/befa60a3-916f-4c29-a0e9-8f4ded2e7807> - The UK and EU have reached a significant post-Brexit agreement aimed at resetting strained relations. The deal, concluded after months of secret negotiations, addresses key issues such as defence cooperation, fishing rights, and market access. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer faces criticism from Eurosceptics and former PM Boris Johnson, who accused him of capitulating to Brussels. Critics within Starmer’s Labour Party argue the government failed to prepare public opinion, making the deal appear as a politically costly concession. A central element is a youth mobility scheme, with plans to facilitate temporary residency and work for young people across both regions, although it remains limited and capped. A major breakthrough involved the UK gaining better access to EU food markets in exchange for a 12-year extension of EU fishing access to British waters. The EU also agreed to a £15 million annual tariff-free steel quota for British producers. Both sides conceded ground, emphasizing the complexities of balancing domestic political pressures and mutual economic interests. Despite celebrating the deal as a “new chapter,” skepticism remains among EU officials over the UK's long-term commitment due to continued domestic political division over Brexit.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/4616acb6-9d5e-4bc5-a92b-0f47222e8e25> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has ruled out rejoining the EU customs union, emphasizing that such a move would undermine the trade agreements recently struck with India and the US. Speaking in Parliament, Starmer described the new EU-UK deal—which includes provisions on fishing, export checks, and a potential youth mobility program—as the beginning of closer cooperation with European neighbors. However, he insisted on maintaining red lines, including remaining outside the customs union. Some Labour aides speculate that future re-evaluation might occur if UK economic growth falters. Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey advocated for stronger economic ties with the EU through a bespoke customs union. Starmer rejected this, citing risks to existing international trade deals and the importance of safeguarding jobs in sectors like automotive manufacturing. The agreement has attracted criticism from Conservative figures, including ex-PM Boris Johnson and party leader Kemi Badenoch, who labeled it a 'capitulation' and accused Starmer of compromising sovereignty. Despite the criticism, Starmer noted broad business support for the deal and contrasted his government's achievements with the Conservative administration's failure to secure similar trade pacts. Meanwhile, Badenoch faces internal pressure following a YouGov poll showing the Tories at a 24-year low.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/84273450-b30b-406d-b0eb-fb267a165656> - The UK government's recent claim of a major post-Brexit travel breakthrough, allowing Britons to use electronic passport gates (e-gates) in the EU, has been downplayed as this development was already part of a broader EU border reform. The Entry/Exit System (EES), a long-planned EU initiative set to launch in October 2025, will permit all non-EU nationals, including UK citizens, to use e-gates at participating airports, provided they are registered with biometric data. While Downing Street promoted the e-gate access as a result of their new agreement with the EU, officials confirmed that there were never any legal barriers to UK participation. The agreement also includes provisions for easing food exports and extends EU fishing rights in UK waters by 12 years. However, the use of e-gates will depend on each EU member state’s implementation, and some within the EU cautioned against overstating the UK's role in the development. Critics have suggested the UK government is overstating its achievements, while EU officials affirm that the real progress will depend on how individual member states adopt the new border systems.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/44910e71-cc63-4d6e-8931-6447b9e74aea> - The UK Labour government has recently made strides in easing trade barriers with India, the EU, and the U.S., marking modest trade successes for Prime Minister Keir Starmer. However, these efforts have sparked backlash from Eurosceptic media, prompting some Labour MPs to argue for a more extensive reintegration with the EU, particularly in reinstating free movement. Yet, free movement remains a politically risky position, despite potential economic benefits. The government's accumulation of small policy achievements has not been sufficient to offset the tight constraints in its existing tax and spending plans. Additional top UK concerns include slashing higher education capital funding—especially for non-STEM fields—and investing up to £48bn in developing new towns. There's increasing worry over youth who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and who now risk being left behind in employment and education. Finally, the EU remains hesitant to fully welcome the UK into its €150bn rearmament fund due to lingering post-Brexit tensions, even as negotiations for further involvement continue.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/78f17b34-996d-4003-b031-4800f4e16918> - At a landmark summit in London, the UK and EU agreed to a comprehensive reset of post-Brexit relations. The deal includes a defence and security partnership, streamlined processes for British farm exports, energy trade, and a veterinary agreement that aligns UK food regulations with EU standards. Prime Minister Keir Starmer hailed the agreement, estimating it will bring £9 billion in economic benefits to the UK, including a projected 20% increase in agrifood exports to the EU. However, the agreement faced criticism for extending EU access to British fishing waters by 12 years, with detractors, including Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, accusing Starmer of compromising national interests. The UK will also fund EU food and animal safety initiatives and accepted continued dynamic alignment with EU food standards. A related communique signals deeper economic cooperation, and discussions continue on youth mobility and rejoining the Erasmus program. Additionally, the EU will ease steel tariffs for the UK, providing a £15 million annual boost. The deal aims to improve cross-border food trade, facilitate holiday travel via EU e-gates, and support Northern Ireland’s unique post-Brexit arrangements.