

# Fair Fishing

CAMPAIGN PACK



**From Sharon Bowles MEP**

Find out more on [www.sharonbowles.org.uk](http://www.sharonbowles.org.uk)



# Fish Facts

Half of all fish caught in the north sea are thrown back overboard dead.

Quotas, as a by-product of the Common Fisheries Policy have been in existence since 1984.

93% of English fishing boats are under ten-metre boats, there will be no more differentiation between under-ten and over-ten metre boats after 2012.

The UK is given 144 tonnes of annual cod quota, France receive 1400 tonnes.

The 1957 Treaty of Rome, that established the European Communities, first suggested the need for a European Fisheries policy.

After the Fish Fight programme aired on Channel 4, supermarkets reported rises of about 20% in sustainable fish being bought by customers.

Small fisheries exist all along our regions' coastline, through Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire.

Sharon Bowles MEP has been campaigning for a fairer deal for local fishermen since 2005.

# Our fishermen need your help...

When I first became an MEP in 2005, one of my first visits was to Hastings, to meet with fisherman Paul Joy and his colleagues.

I remember being appalled at the uphill struggle these fishermen faced just to carry on the local businesses that their families have often been in for decades.

Some of the problems are those of the industry as a whole, but others were really quite specific to South East fishermen.

Fishing is a hard profession anyway, with the weather and sea being challenging colleagues on even the best of days! I was hugely impressed by the commitment and dedication these businesses showed. They are passionate about their industry.

Some people still fail to realise how fisheries also prop up our regional economy: the fishmongers in high streets who sell the fish, the restaurants and hotels who buy them. Without our small fishing fleets we will lose a vital piece of the region's tradition as well as its benefits to the economy.

I hope you find this pack useful. Please do email my office to let us know what campaigning you do on this issue - we are keen to hear all your stories!

Email [info@sharonbowles.org.uk](mailto:info@sharonbowles.org.uk)

Happy campaigning!

*Sharon*

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# Fishing in the South East

Criticism of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is not a new phenomenon, indeed Sharon has been campaigning for reform since she became an MEP in 2005!

The most contentious parts of the CFP are the discards and quotas policies.

**Quotas are the amount of fish that a particular fleet are allowed to catch. Different quotas are set for different species of fish.**

The EU Council of Ministers agrees the quotas for each country to catch, and then each country's government divides that number between their regions and fishing fleets.

Outrageously, the most damage to the South East's fishermen has been done over the past ten years by the government here in Britain, in their allocation of quota. They favour big fishing organisations over the smaller fleets, of which we have a large number in the South East.

Sharon has been pressing the EU's Competition Commissioner to recognise the unfairness of the UK policy. She has argued that the under 10-metre fleet fish in an environmentally sustainable way and should be moved out of quota altogether.

**Discarding is the practice of throwing dead fish back into the sea to avoid going over your permitted quota.**

For example, if a fleet is allowed to land 3 kilos of cod, but catches two big fish each weighing 3 kilos, the discards policy says that one of those dead fish must not be brought back into port but thrown back into the sea, even if it has already died in the nets (as many do).

This discards policy leads to extraordinary numbers of dead fish being thrown back into the sea. Some estimates suggest that half the fish caught in the North sea are thrown away, overboard, due to the discards policy.

EU Fishing Commissioner Maria Damanaki recently announced her support to ending the destructive discards policy. Now we wait to see what happens!



● Sharon (centre) and Catherine Bearder MEP (right) inspect some Sussex lobster pots on one of their many visits to meet with our region's fishermen

## On CFP reform, Sharon has written:

- a letter to the Labour government's UK Fisheries Minister,
- a Letter to the European Fisheries Commissioner,
- a formal complaint to the European Competition Commissioner,
- a follow-up letter to the Competition Commissioner,
- a submission to the Common Fisheries Policy Consultation
- a letter to the new Conservative Fisheries Minister
- a letter to local fishermen about discards with Catherine Bearder MEP
- this campaign pack!

# Armchair Fishing

The problem of Armchair Fishing has developed in the last three years or so as a by-product of unfair quota allocations by the UK government.

The national governments allocate proportions of that country's quota to different fishing fleets.

Large companies get most of the quota as they have the biggest boats. Other fleets use smaller boats (less than 10 metres long) and are normally operated by smaller businesses.

**Some of these larger companies then act as “Armchair Fishermen” by leasing their surplus quota to smaller inshore fishermen, making a hefty profit in the process.**

The larger companies can sell off some of their quota because they have more than they need. The smaller fleets need to buy the extra quota allowance because without it they will struggle to make a living.

For example, the current system allows sub-10 metre class boats to catch just 1.5 kg of cod per day. When you consider that just one cod can weigh 3kg that is a catch of half a cod per day – not enough to cover the cost of fuel let alone pay the crew.

**The smaller fishing fleets are being held to ransom, having to pay huge prices, for this extra quota allowance that they should have been given in the first place!**

Sharon is therefore calling on the UK government to address the totally unfair problem of the UK's fishing quota allocation and in particular the callous profiteering of armchair fishermen.

She has already written to Richard Benyon, the UK's Fisheries Minister, expressing her concern.



**Now Sharon needs YOUR help to take this campaign forward.**

**On the next page you will read about TV Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and the Fish Fight campaign. He campaigned and the EU Commission has listened.**

**Now let's do the same for our small fishing fleets and stop this modern day scandal of Armchair Fishing!**





# Fish Fight!

Last year Channel 4 worked with a group of TV chefs to change the nation's attitude toward farmed chickens. Overnight sales of free-range chicken rocketed upwards and consumer awareness increased dramatically.

This year's food crusade is focused on fish, with the spearhead of the campaign being Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's "Fish Fight".

**Hugh's Fish Fight seeks to change only one part of the CFP - they are trying to overturn the policy of discards.**

Around 660,000 people have signed Hugh's petition for an end to discards so far - Sharon has signed and offered her support!

The campaign has generated a huge amount of publicity and prompted European Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki to make a statement saying that she believes that in today's climate of declining fish stocks this policy is no longer right or ethical.

**It seems that the days of discarding fish are now numbered. This is an enormous success for the campaign, and real evidence that the Commission does listen to the views of the public.**

Commissioner Damanaki has made several proposals as to how things could be changed. There must still be some measures in place to prevent over-fishing of some species of fish. A scenario where there was no legislation at all could possibly have the worst imaginable effect and see some fish like cod eventually becoming an endangered species!

Sharon has signed this petition and if you haven't already there is still time. Every extra supporter will help Commissioner Damanaki to ensure reform happens and is not left on the back burner for years to come.

If you missed Hugh's programmes, you can learn more and sign the petition at the Fish Fight Campaign website here:

**[www.fishfight.net](http://www.fishfight.net)**



- Sharon has signed Hugh's Fish Fight petition, but she has also lent her support to local campaigns like this Hastings petition calling for a better deal for local fishermen.

The other part of the Fish Fight campaign is to encourage us, as members of the public, to buy and cook fish that are less well known.

Cod, salmon and tuna currently account for more than 50% of all fish bought in the UK and some less well known (but still tasty) fish are simply thrown away by fishermen as there is no market for them in the shops.

The fish fight website has a lot of recipes you can try using fish like coley, flounder and sole. They are even campaigning to get local chippies to sell mackerel baps as an alternative to cod and chips!

If only all campaigning was this tasty!

# Council Motion

**Are you a local Councillor at any level? Or do you know a local Councillor?**

Below is a template for a motion you could submit to your local Council for discussion. Remember to amend it to suit your individual area's situation. In particular if you have a strong fishing presence, be sure to mention that! Remember that even if it does not get passed you can still publicise that the local Lib Dem group are standing up for the rights of the region's small fishing fleets.

## Sample motion to Council: Fair Fishing

This Council notes TV Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's successful "Fish Fight" Campaign.

This Council also notes that under-ten metre fishing boats are a tremendous boon to small coastal communities across the South East.

This Council further notes that these small fishing fleets are being sidelined by the UK government, who allocate the majority of the fishing quota to large producer organisations.

In response to the "Fish Fight" campaign, we as a council agree to capture the zeitgeist and push for a fairer allocation of quota for UK in-shore fishermen.

This council agrees therefore to write to Richard Benyon MP, the Fisheries Minister, pressing him to re-evaluate the way in which UK fishing quotas are allocated, to the benefit of in-shore fishermen.

This Council also pledges to expand, where possible, the selection of fish that we purchase and eat by consuming some of the more sustainable species of local fish, instead of producer organisation-caught cod, salmon and tuna, the over-fishing of which has had to be curtailed by problematic quota.

Furthermore, in adopting this motion, this Council also hopes that, by example, the residents of [area] will follow suit, regarding the consumption of lesser known fish, thereby contributing both to a marked reduction in the practice of discards while supporting the sustainable end of the fish market.

**TOP TIP:** *If you live in a coastal area, or an area with a lot of fishing, consider amending this motion to include a line about supporting local fishermen by buying locally when possible.*

# News Release



**Anytown Liberal Democrats**  
Parliamentary Spokesperson: Joe Bloggs  
Phone: XXXXX XXX XXX  
Email: XXXXXX@anytownlibdems.org.uk

## Anytown Lib Dems call for action on “Armchair” fishing

Anytown Lib Dems have joined local MEP Sharon Bowles in calling for an end to the practice of “armchair fishing” [by submitting a motion to Council *if appropriate*].

“Armchair” fishermen are land-based businessmen who sell their excess fishing quota, at high prices, to small fishing fleets. The small fleets have to buy this extra quota in order to make their businesses viable.

Lib Dem MEP Sharon Bowles said “It is a modern day scandal that our smaller fishing fleets are being forced to pay large amounts of money, just to be allowed to land enough fish to make a living. This problem is being created by politicians and bureaucrats in Westminster. Our small fleets must be given a fairer share of the UK fishing quota.”

Local Anytown Lib Dem spokesperson Joe Bloggs said “I know a lot of local people watched “Fish Fight” on Channel 4 and signed Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s petition. Brussels is doing their part to end their damaging discards policy. Now the British Government must act to stop these “Armchair” fishermen from exploiting the UK system for their own profit.”

Sharon Bowles concluded, “I am asking all Anytown residents to sign my petition asking the government to end this unfair practice. [www.sharonbowles.org.uk](http://www.sharonbowles.org.uk)”

ENDS

**Whether or not you submit the motion to Council, consider putting out this press release... Just amend it as appropriate and fill your details in. Feel free to change your quotes but please don’t change Sharon’s without permission!**

# How YOU can help

## 1 Eat sustainable fish

It's simple, but will really work! If demand increases for fish, particularly the less common kinds, then more places will sell them and it will become easier for fishing fleets to sell their catch. Try to avoid cod, salmon and tuna as these invariably come from the larger fisheries. Instead try mackerel, bass, coley, sole, dab and many other delicious alternatives. Just because some of these have fallen out of being "fashionable" does not stop them being very tasty! Also remember at the fish counter to look for more than just prices. Ask where the fish were caught and consider paying more for fish from small local producers when you can.

## 2 Sign our petition

Visit Sharon's website [www.sharonbowles.org.uk](http://www.sharonbowles.org.uk) and follow the link to the Fair Fishing Campaign. Sign Sharon's petition calling on the UK government to end Armchair Fishing now. Also, if you have not already done so, visit [www.fishfight.net](http://www.fishfight.net) and sign the petition launched by TV Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. Also remember to tell your local press about the Armchair Fishing campaign. Several local newspapers are already running petitions on fishing and it is good to lend these campaigns your support too.

## 3 Lobby Lawmakers

The Fish Fight campaign has proved that people power really does work. 660,000 signatures from almost exclusively British signatories has provoked moves toward real change in Brussels. If you engage with your local representatives they can support you more effectively. Write to your MP about the way the UK government allocates quotas. Ask your local Council to consider the sample motion in this pack. Write a letter to your local newspapers about the campaign, and highlight the problem of Armchair Fishing as the next big issue for CFP reform. Even if you just talk about these issues to your friends, make sure you help spread the word!



## Drop-in Artwork

Next time you are designing a FOCUS, tabloid or members newsletter for your area, why not include an article from this page?

A lot of people are aware of these issues thanks to the Fish Fight campaign, so why not publicise the great work Lib Dems have done on this issue?

Do send us copies of anything you publish, we would love to see them!

[Info@sharonbowles.org.uk](mailto:Info@sharonbowles.org.uk)

## “Armchair” fishing outrage

Local MEP Sharon Bowles is highlighting the scandalous practice of “Armchair Fishing”.

Large fisheries sell off their excess fishing quota at high prices to smaller fleets who are struggling to survive.

Sharon said “This practice only exists because of the unfair way that Westminster allocates quotas.”

Sign Sharon’s petition [www.sharonbowles.org.uk](http://www.sharonbowles.org.uk)



## Local MEP fights for fairer fishing

Local Lib Dem MEP Sharon Bowles has fought for a fairer deal for our region’s fishermen since she became an MEP.



Sharon has met with fishermen regularly over those years and taken up various issues of concern on their behalf.

Her most recent campaign is against the practice of “armchair” fishing. This refers to the practice of large fisheries selling off their excess fishing quota to smaller fleets - at a profit. The small fleets have to buy the high-price allowance to be able to catch enough fish to make a profit in their business.

Sharon said “Armchair fishing only exists because the UK government is not treating our smaller fishing fleets fairly in the allocation of quota.”

Sign her petition on her website: [www.sharonbowles.org.uk](http://www.sharonbowles.org.uk)

# MEP battles “armchair” fishing

**Local MEP Sharon Bowles is continuing her fight to get a better deal for the South East’s fishermen.**

Sharon said “The practice of discards - throwing dead fish back into the sea just to meet EU quotas - is thankfully now set to end. Now we must address the other problems our fishing fleets face.”

Sharon is specifically highlighting the problem of “armchair” fishing. This is when large companies seek to make a profit out of selling some of their fishing quotas at high prices to small local businessmen.

Small fisheries need to buy these extra allowances to make a profit and pay their crews.

Sharon said “Our fishermen are being held to ransom by these “Armchair” fishermen. The UK government can stop this by reallocating quotas more fairly and should do so immediately.”



Sharon Bowles MEP with Paul Joy, Chairman of Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society.

Find out more about Sharon’s campaign and sign her petition on “armchair” fishing on her website:

**[www.SharonBowles.org.uk](http://www.SharonBowles.org.uk)**