

As many predicted, the highly discriminatory two-tier license system has now fallen into complete disarray and created far more problems than it would ever have prevented.

To continue with the farcical appeals system will only waste more taxpayer's money, involve more expense for fishermen and do nothing to increase the amount of quota available to under-ten fishermen. Those who are refused a license will merely use the escape route of re-registration to obtain a full license, the only sensible move should be for DEFRA to abandon the whole sorry process and save fishermen the expense and worry that accompanies this ill conceived initiative.

However common sense and logic appear to be two qualities that are sadly missing in the present DEFRA regime and no doubt the system will be played out to the end with the bloody-minded attitude that prevails in MFA headquarters.

There are however a number of lessons that must be learnt from the last 12 months both by DEFRA, cabinet ministers and under-ten fishermen.

In the coming months DEFRA must listen to the industry, it is our industry and they are merely the custodians of it.

The license buy-back idea as mooted by the industry was discarded by DEFRA as it was considered not cost effective, the money that has been wasted on the two-tier system must now make that decision look increasingly foolish.

Unlike the policy-makers in London, the vast majority of fishing leaders are not university graduates but what they do have is a far greater understanding of the needs of fishermen and what makes fishing the unique industry that it is. This knowledge cannot be learnt in a classroom but from years of practical experience and DEFRA should harness that knowledge for the good of all. It can only be hoped that the red faces being experienced in London at this time take this onboard.

Fishing ministers past and present have come into the job with no knowledge of the industry at all and have merely been manipulated by DEFRA, this is painfully obvious when a new man comes to the post and states exactly what his predecessor has stated before him. When the next Minister is appointed which if the constant reshuffling of cabinet ministers, will not be too far away he must come with an open mind and listen to industry representatives as well as just his DEFRA advisors before making such potentially damaging decisions.

Fishermen must learn from the last twelve months that to ignore the morass of paperwork that falls on their mat can have disastrous consequences, only 300 replies was taken by DEFRA as a green light to implement whatever they saw fit.

All fishermen should belong to a national organisation whether it is NUTFA or the NFFO and maintain that membership not just when they have a problem. NUTFA membership increased by nearly 100 members when the two-tier license came into play.

The next twelve months are going to be extremely difficult and all fishermen need to be more politically aware the days when fishermen just went to sea landed their fish and then went home are unfortunately times of the past.

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