

There can be few poison chalices quite as potent as that which is held currently in the hands of Huw Irranca-Davies as he has now discovered. There can be few within the fishing industry that are not aware that the real decision making comes from the mandarins of DEFRA. Fishing ministers past and present, probably due to the complexities of the industry, and the short time in office, merely rubber stamp whatever flawed policy is put before them. Advocates of the “we are where we are” syndrome are usually those who have made the mistakes in the past and will not face up to the consequences of their actions. The track record of DEFRA is riddled with mistakes and incompetence, it is now time to put some of them right. The Minister has at last conceded this point but appears to be unable or unwilling to rectify the situation. Nobody can change history but the injustices from the past must be addressed, was this not so then the slave trade would still be flourishing, women would still be chained to the railings of parliament and 8 year old boys would be climbing the chimneys of London.

The two-tier system is ill conceived, unjust, highly discriminatory, probably illegal in EU law and will not increase the amount of quota available to any under-ten fisherman. The Minister is no doubt acutely aware of this and it is painfully obvious that to divert NUTFA from what is a constitutional right that of a legal challenge he feels it necessary to resort to what can only be seen as political blackmail. The problem of latent license would have been far better addressed by license buy-back as recommended by NUTFA and endorsed by PO,s and the NFFO ,the advantage of this being their removal from the register permanently. The two-tier system could well create far more problems than it will solve. To explain what could well be the outcome of such a proposal, those that have caught less than 300kilos and many may have caught none at all, will now be able to catch just 300kilos. The likelihood is that many who were quite happy to catch little or no fish would now fish right up to their maximum allowance for fear of losing their entitlement completely should DEFRA move the goalposts in years to come, should this occur the situation would deteriorate rapidly. There is however a far more potentially damaging consequence, any second class license holder looking to supplement his income (whether he be a shell fisherman or have a second job ashore) would not wish to use up his 300 kilos on lesser value species like Plaice, small Pollack or even smaller grades of Sole, but would target top end species like prime Sole to maximise his profit. This would of course result in the dumping of fish and the increase of gear on the ground. Another point worth noting is that many fishermen have diversified into other fisheries to help eek out the pitiful quota, it is quite likely that any fishermen thinking of doing this in the future would not wish to take this option for fear of losing his entitlement.

The Minister calls on NUTFA to join his advisory board that would not be just a “talking shop” but a genuine panel of people who can advise and take us on to the next stages, however with the knowledge that DEFRA intend to make the boats fit the quota by the decimation of ¾ of the English fleet (not the Welsh Scottish or N Ireland fleet) it is likely that as in the past we will not be listened to. It should be mentioned that NUTFA have at no time refused to meet the Minister or his officials to discuss any issues pertaining to the under-ten fleet and to make this offer in the press rather than pick up the phone or e-mail can only be seen as a move to discredit our organisation.

We are not unreasonable people but as things stand at the present we have more faith in the ability of the English legal system to address the problems of the under -n fleet, than we have in the present DEFRA administration. Dave Cuthbert Co-chair NUTFA