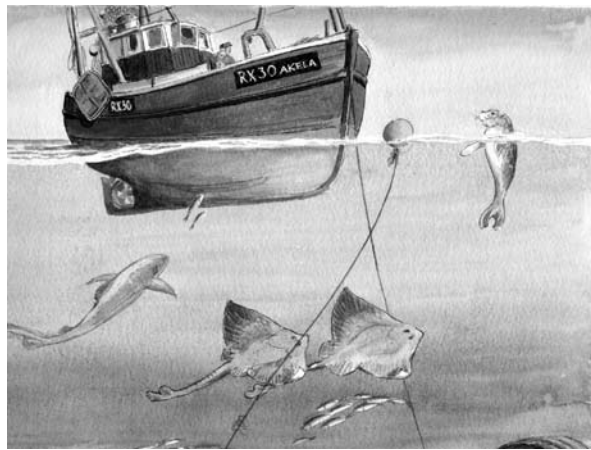


rhboa 92 - Fishing Supplement November 2000

Rye Harbour Boat Owners Association

FISHING SUPPLEMENT

'Sea fisheries remain the only significant economic activity of developed countries which are a form not of harvesting or of processing, but of hunting'.



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Sir Edward Heath has dismissed as 'absurd and insulting' the notion that he betrayed the fishermen.

November 2000

Local Anarchists

Given that many British fishing fleets now face bankruptcy because of this government's excessive tax burden on fuel, we are shocked our MP described the protestors as a 'ragbag of anarchists' when they were supported by 94 per cent of the people in an ITV survey.

It was wrong for him to say the fault lies with 'OPEC' and the oil companies, for they supply the same product at the same price to the other European countries. Mr Foster's figures on the rest of Europe's prices just do not add up. It is clearly this government's burden of taxation which has driven people to react strongly. 72 per cent of British fuel prices is taxation, yet we are the only one of the seven biggest western economies which is self-sufficient in oil.

Recent tax rises added £4 billion extra to the government's coffers, money they were not expecting when elected. BP makes profits of £3,800 a second. If a windfall tax were imposed on the oil companies it would raise all the necessary funds to run the NHS and education and would lower the fuel tax on motorists (Mr Foster's constituents).

The fishing fleets of his constituency - Hastings and Rye - are now becoming unviable. We are having to lay up our vessels because it is uneconomical to go to sea. With Rye trawlers costing up to £ 100 a night for fuel, and the smaller Hastings trawlers £50-£60, bankruptcy will become inevitable if this is not addressed. It is not that fuel is unavailable - we just cannot afford it. The price for fishermen and farmers has gone up 200 per cent this year, and like all British motorists and hauliers, we have no option but to buy fuel, whatever burden of taxation.

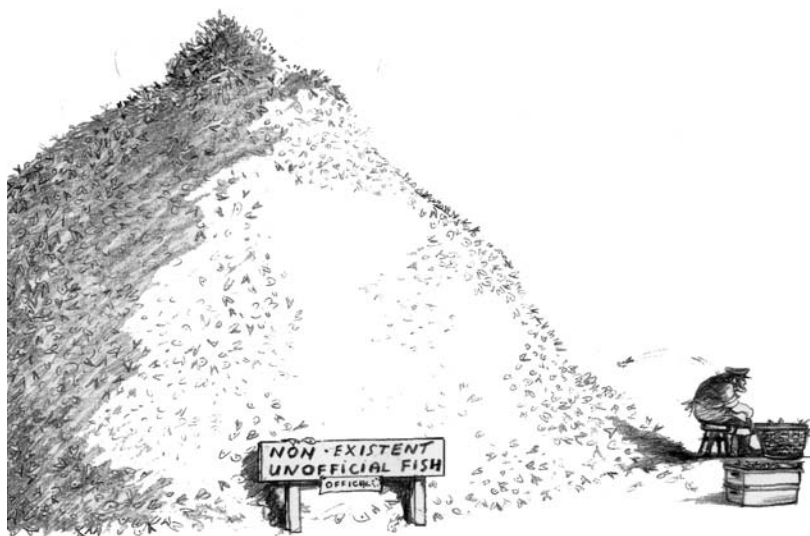
Michael Foster, like Tony Blair, has lost touch with his grassroots, the people who were demonstrating were doing it out of sheer necessity. While our European counterparts are laughing at transport operations in this country, and European fishing fleets are taking over fishing in our waters, our government seems quite willing so leave the burden of taxation on people who have to pay excessive taxes.

When the government's 60 days are up, the whole of the south-east fishing industry is very willing to participate in whatever action is necessary to make the government listen to the so-called 'anarchists' who elected them.

Paul Joy, Chairman, Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society

Boston Sprats

Our major parties all agree that the 'Common Fisheries Policy' serves Britain's interests, even though it rests on handing over to the EU those four-fifths of Europe's fish that are in British waters. Sir Leon Brittan liked to extol the measures taken by Brussels to stop fishing for herring in the North Sea, because there were hardly any herring left. To prove the point, Ken Bagley, a fisherman from Boston, Lincolnshire, recently went out into the Wash to fish for sprats. His echo-sounder showed a huge shoal, stretching for several miles. He shot his gear and pulled up his net full of fish. Not sprats, but small herring - 10 tonnes of them. Of course, because the Brussels officials of 'Directorate General XIV' have decided there are no herring, Mr Bagley had no quota. So, under regulations designed to 'conserve fish stock', he had to throw all 10 tonnes back into the sea.



In 48 hours Mr Bagley shot his nets four times. Each time they came up containing more herring than sprats, because the two species shoal together. All told he caught well over 50 tonnes...several million fish. And each time, because he is a law-abiding citizen...Mr Bagley is Mayor of Boston and Chairman of the local fisherman's association...back they had to go.

A week later, another vast shoal showed up on his echo-sounder and this time, when the net came up, they were sprats, 15 tonnes of them. Back to port he went, and there on the quay was an official of the 'Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries'. He peered at Ken's catch and among the sprats he found a few young herring - hardly surprising since they not only swim alongside sprats but look identical. 'How do you expect me to tell the difference?' Ken asked. 'Simple,' said the official, 'you stroke their bellies like this. The herrings are smoother.'

Fishermen join blockade

Fishermen joined the fuel protests linking up with farmers and hauliers to blockade an oil depot in Plymouth. Members of the *'Plymouth Fishermen's Association'*, who have nearly 100 vessels between them, prevented road tankers leaving one of the South-West's main depots at Cattedown Wharfs. It is used by Shell, Esso and BP.

In a development of the fuel price protest, the fishermen joined up with *'Farmers for Action'*, the militant pressure group set up last year. Dave Pessel, spokesman for the Plymouth fishermen, said: 'We all see ourselves going to the wall. Fuel is now accounting for up to 50 percent of the costs of our vessels. The figure is growing and nothing is being done about it. We are all saying, enough is enough.' Increasing numbers of fishing vessels are now tied up in harbour because owners cannot afford to put to sea due to high fuel costs.

Another problem is that crews are drifting away. Fishermen are paid from a share of their catches after fuel and other running costs are deducted for the boat. Fuel is now soaking up so much of the profits that individual earnings have plunged.

Boston Sprats (continued)

It took the inspector two hours to sort through one basket weighing less than three stone. If Mr Bagley used this method to go through all those 15 tonnes - well over a million fish - it would have taken him 31 days and nights. He was eventually allowed to land his catch, but is now awaiting prosecution on the criminal charge of landing herring and could face a fine of up to £ 50 000. Eight boats are now tied up in Boston harbour, because their owners are terrified that the same thing could happen to them.

When the local MP, Sir Richard Body, wrote to the fisheries minister, Tony Baldry, that keen fan of the *'Common Fisheries Policy'* wrote back the usual two pages of gobbledegook to say it was 'very regrettable' that Mr Bagley had to chuck away all those millions of fish that don't officially exist. But in the future he should use the 'sampling procedure' laid down by 'Community legislation' since 1987 rubbing the fishes' bellies to make sure he is not catching the wrong kind. Sir Leon would be proud of him.



Sunday Telegraph on 9th March 1997 in Christopher Booker's Notebook

Skate near extinction around Britain

The common skate is believed to be extinct in the Irish Sea and will disappear from around the British coast unless measures are taken to save it, the *'Worldwide Fund for Nature'* said yesterday.

The fish - which grows to more than 6ft long and 200lbs in weight and lives for up to 50 years - takes a long time to reproduce and very few survive to maturity because of fishing pressure. It is so rare that too few are caught by research vessels to analyse population levels, according to the report, *'Marine Health Check'*, which finds the wildlife around Britain's shores in crisis.



The WWF wants 'fishing-free zones' to allow species to recover. But Barrie Deas, chief executive of the *'National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations'*, called the proposal 'simplistic and naive'.

Conservationists say fish sold as skate in the shops is mostly from other species of ray. Common skate are still found on the slopes of the continental shelf at depths of around 1,900ft, but these tend to be fished out as soon as they are found. Chris Berry, the author of the report, said: 'I was shocked to see what a sorry state the UK marine environment is in, with no co-ordinated legislation to save and improve it.'

Daily Telegraph 20th September 2000

Fishing Regulations in New England †

New Englanders started catching swordfish in the early 1800s by harpooning them from small sailboats and hauling them on board. Since swordfish don't school, the boats would go out with a man up the mast looking for single fins lolling about in the glassy inland waters. If the wind sprang up, the fins were undetectable, and the boats went in. When the lookout spotted a fish, he guided the captain over to it, and the harpooner made his throw. The throw had to take into account the roll of the boat, the darting of the fish, and the refraction of light through water.

Giant bluefin tuna are still hunted this way, but fishermen use spotter planes to find their prey and electric harpoons to kill them. Giant bluefin are a delicacy in Japan; they are air-freighted over and get up to eighty dollars a pound. A single bluefish might go for thirty or forty thousand dollars.

Spotter planes were introduced to New England fishermen in 1962, but it was the longline that really changed the fishery. For years the Norwegians had caught *mako* on longlines, along with a few swordfish, but they had never gone after swordfish exclusively. Then, in 1961, Canadian fishermen made some alterations to the gear and nearly tripled the total northeastern sword catch.

The boom didn't last long, though; ten years later the 'U.S. Food and Drug Administration' determined that swordfish carried a dangerous amount of mercury in them, and both the American and Canadian governments banned sale of the fish. Some longliners went out after swordfish anyway, but they risked having their catch seized and tested by the 'F.D.A'. Finally, in 1978, the U.S. government relaxed the standards for acceptable mercury contamination in fish, and the gold rush was on.

Fishing for Profit

They'd been at sea a month and taken fifteen tons of swordfish. Prices fluctuate so wildly, though, that a sword boat crew often has no idea how well they've done until after the fish have been sold. And even then there's room for error: Boat owners have been known to negotiate a lower price with the buyer and then recover part of their loss in secret. That way they don't share the entire profit with their crew.

Be that as it may, the 'Andrea Gail' sold her catch to 'O'Hara Seafoods' for \$136,812, plus another \$4,770 for a small amount of tuna. Bob Brown, the owner, first took out for fuel, fishing tackle, bait, a new mainline, wharfage, ice, and a hundred other odds and ends that added up to over \$35,000. That was deducted from the gross, and Brown took home half of what was left: roughly \$53,000.

The collected crew expenses— food, gloves, shore help—were paid on credit and then deducted from the other \$53,000, and the remainder was divided up among the crew: Almost \$20,000 to Captain Billy Tyne, \$6,453 to Pierre and Murphy, \$5,495 to Moran, and \$4,537 each to Shatford and Kosco. The shares were calculated by seniority and if Shatford and Kosco didn't like it, they were free to find another boat.

†Both items on this page are extracts from 'The Perfect Storm' by Sebastian Junger

Fishing Regulations (continued)

In the interim fishing had changed, though; boats were using satellite navigation, electronic fish finders, temperature-depth gauges. Radar reflectors were used to track gear, and new monofilament made it possible to set thirty or forty miles of line at a time. By the mid-eighties, the U.S. swordfish fleet alone was up to 700 boats fishing around fifty million hooks a year. 'The technological change appears to be bumping up against the limits of the resource,' as one government study put it at the time.

Until then the fishery had been relatively unregulated, but a new drift-entanglement net in the early eighties finally got the wheels of bureaucracy turning. The nets were a mile long, ninety-foot wide, and set out all night from the stern of a converted longliner. Although the large mesh permitted juveniles to escape, the '*National Marine Fisheries Service*' was still leery of its impact on the swordfish population. They published a management plan for the North Atlantic swordfish that suggested numerous regulatory changes, including limiting the use of drift nets, and invited responses from state and federal agencies, as well as individual fishermen.

Public hearings were held up and down the East Coast throughout 1983 and 1984, and fishermen who couldn't attend - those who were fishing - sent in letters. One of the people who responded was Bob Brown, who explained in a barely-legible scrawl that he'd made 52 sets that year and there seemed to be plenty of mature fish out there, they just stayed in colder water than people realized. Alex Bueno of the '*Tiffany Vance*' wrote a letter pointing out that draggers weren't likely to switch over to drift nets because they cost too much, and that swordfish population estimates were inaccurate because they didn't take into account fish outside the 200-mile limit.

Sportsfishermen accused commercial fishermen of raping the oceans, commercial fishermen accused sportsfishermen of squandering a resource, and almost everyone accused the government of gross incompetence. In the end, the '*Fishery Management Plan*' did not include a catch quota for Atlantic swordfish, but it required all sword boats to register with the '*National Marine Fisheries Service*', a division of the '*Department of Commerce*'. Boat owners who had never swordfished in their lives scrambled for permits just to keep their options open, and the number of boats nearly doubled while, by all indications, the swordfish stock continued to decline.

From 1987 to 1991, the total North Atlantic swordfish catch went from 45 million pounds to 33 million pounds, and their average size dropped from 160 pounds to 110. That was happening throughout the fishing industry. Haddock landings had plummeted to one-fiftieth of what they were in 1960, cod landings had dropped by a factor of four. The culprit - as it almost always has been in fishing - was a sudden change in technology. New quick-freeze techniques allowed boats to work halfway around the world and process their fish as they went, and this made the three-mile limit around most countries completely ineffectual.

Fishing Regulations (continued)

Enormous Russian factory ships put to sea for months at a time and scoured the bottom with nets that could take 30 tons of fish in a single haul. They fished practically within sight of the American coast, and within years the fish populations had been staggered by 50% losses. Congress had to take action, and in 1976 they passed the '*Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act*', which extended US sovereignty to 200 miles offshore. Most other nations quickly followed suit.



'Can I bring to order the nineteenth session of the committee to select members for the commission to investigate the growth of quangos.'

Of course, the underlying concern wasn't for fish populations, it was for the American fleet. Having chased out the competition, America set about constructing an industry that could scrape Georges Bank just as bare as any Russian factory ship. After the passage of the '*Magnuson Act*', American fishermen could take out federally-guaranteed loans and set themselves up for business in quarter-million dollar steel boats. To make matters worse, the government established eight regional fishing councils that were exempt from conflict-of-interest laws. In theory, this should have put fisheries management in the hands of the people who fished. In reality, it showed the fox into the chicken coop.

Within three years of '*Magnuson*' the New England fleet had doubled to 1,300 boats. Better equipment resulted in such huge takes that prices dropped and fishermen had to resort to more and more devastating methods just to keep up. Draggers raked the bottom so hard that they actually levelled outcrops and filled in valleys—the very habitats where fish thrived. A couple of good years in the mid-eighties masked the overall decline, but the end was near, and many people knew it

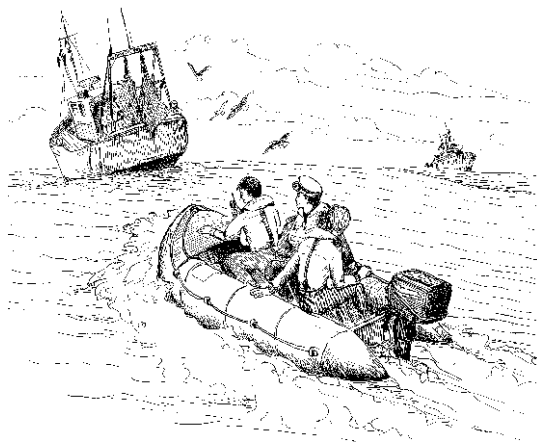
The first time anyone - at least any fisherman - suggested a closure was in 1988, when a Chatham fisherman named Mark Simonitsch stood up to speak at a '*New England Fisheries Council*' meeting. Simonitsch had fished off Cape Cod his whole life; his brother, James, was a marine safety consultant who had worked for Bob Brown. Both men knew fishermen, knew fish, and knew where things were headed.

Simonitsch suggested that Georges Bank be closed to all fishing, indefinitely. He was shouted down, but it was the beginning of the end. The swordfish population didn't crash as fast as some others, but it crashed all the same. By 1988, the combined North Atlantic fleet was fishing over one hundred million hooks a year, and catch logs were showing that the swordfish population was getting younger and younger. Finally, in 1990, the '*International Commission for the Conservation of Tunas*' suggested a fishing quota for the North Atlantic swordfish.

Gunboats & Private Property

A powerful agency to control fishing across the EU is being considered by the 'European Commission'. Among the favoured options is a supra-national body that could carry out spot checks with its own patrol ships backed by aircraft. Dr Richard North, a fisheries expert for the 'UK Independence Party' at the 'European Parliament', said that allowing the build-up of an EU patrol fleet would be 'tantamount to allowing the EU its own gunboats.'

Enforcement of EU fishing codes is carried out at present by member states. They act against their own fishermen, causing great bitterness. In Britain this means rigorous patrolling by the 'Royal Navy' and 'Ministry of Agriculture' aircraft. Spain's notoriously lax inspectors, on the other hand, are accused of turning a blind eye when their fishermen exceed their permitted catch or use illegal nets.



The common fisheries policy, which ends in 2002 is widely seen as a failure that has done nothing to increase fish stocks while impoverishing many of the EU's half million fishermen. The commission wants vessels decommissioned, with welfare subsidies being paid to fishing communities.

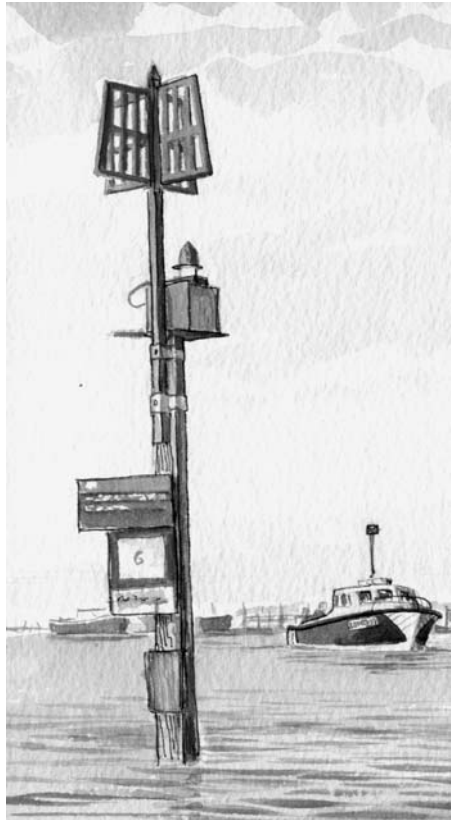
But critics say the real problem is the incentive structure which encourages skippers to over-fish at the wrong times rather than lose catch to rival fleets. The alternative is a scheme tried in Australia, New Zealand and North America that gives fishermen a property right over fishing waters. This system makes it worthwhile for fishermen to take the long view and reduce their catch until re-stocking has occurred.

Fishing Regulations (continued)

The following year the 'National Marine Fishery Service' implemented a quota of 6.9 million pounds of dressed swordfish for U.S.-licensed sword boats, roughly two-thirds of the previous year's catch. Every U.S.-licensed boat had to report their catch when they arrived back in port, and as soon as the overall quota was met, the entire fishery was shut down. In a good year the quota might be met in September; in bad years it might not be met at all. The result was that not only were fishing boats now racing the season, they were racing each other. When the 'Andrea Gail' left port on September 23, she was working under a quota for the first time in her life.

Rogues & Quotas

Angry skipper/owners in SE England are blaming officials from the 'Ministry of Agriculture, Farming & Fisheries (MAFF)' for a dispute which has left them facing substantial alteration costs to their vessels, a hefty legal bill and a confrontation with some fellow fishermen. Fifteen fishing vessels in Sussex and Kent are part of an estimated 100 boats nationally of just under 10m whose owners shortened them so that they came into the under 10m category when re-measured. Some of the owners then refitted the bow or stern sections to improve the appearance of their boats, which looked odd after being shortened.



The owners wanted to fish in the under 10m sector because the non-sector quotas in the over 10m sector were so small that they could not make a legal living.

They say that all their actions to move into the under 10m sector, including the shortening of their boats and subsequent re-lengthening, licence transfers etc. were done with the full knowledge and approval of 'MAFF' officials. But they were branded by some other fishermen as rogues trying to beat the system and as a result 'MAFF' has now forced them to remove the extra sections on their boats which were replaced after the boats were re-measured as under 10m.

Selling these devalued boats will be almost impossible because licences in the under 10m sector have a much lower value than those in the over 10m sector. Some of the fishermen also face considerable costs in complying with the new rule.

They have been pursuing legal moves against 'MAFF' to try to get the ruling reversed that they must replace the sections which were removed, but without success. So they have now 'gone public' to clear their names and reputations and to point out that 'MAFF' officials co-operated in their actions throughout.

Report by Patrick Formoy (Tel 01903 215762 for photo of Ricky Goodsell inspecting the cut off stern section of the 'Princess' at Rye Harbour).

Breaching Rules

Fisheries Minister Elliot Morley said that the practice of shortening boats and then replacing the parts was 'not acceptable'. 'This was a distortion of the procedures for moving from the over 10m to the under 10m sector. Taking action to stop it was one of the things for which we got overwhelming support in the under 10m consultation,' Mr. Morley told *'Fishing News'*.

On the claims that '*MAFF*' officials had condoned what the fishermen had done, Mr. Morley said he could not answer for what officials may have said or done in earlier years before he came to office. But what the fishermen had done was 'clearly a breach of the rules'. 'We gave them a year to either remove the parts of their boats they had replaced or acquire an over 10m licence,' said Mr. Morley. Backing for the fishermen's claims has come from John Stroud, the chief fishery officer in the Kent area of the '*Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee*', which has daily contact with the inshore fleet.

Mr. Stroud told *'Fishing News'* that several years ago, when fishermen had first begun to shorten their boats, he had been on Dungeness beach and had heard '*MAFF*' officials 'encourage fishermen to shorten their boats to bring them under 10m'

'These are not 'cowboys'. Some of them are the top fishermen in Kent,' said Mr. Stroud.



'There is no way they would have engaged in costly work to shorten their boats without fully consulting the ministry or the measuring authorities. The '*MAFF*' officials are in regular contact with the fishermen, they know all the boats and they have to deal with the licensing and so on - they must have been fully aware of what the fishermen were doing and they certainly did nothing to stop them at the time.'

He conceded that there may have been some fishermen in later years who shortened boats simply to make money, but said that '*MAFF*' could have recognised the plight of the genuine men by giving them a few years to comply with the new measurement rules. This would have given them time to acquire new boats or otherwise adjust to the situation. As it was they were having to spend thousands of pounds on work which ultimately would have no effect on the fishery or the stocks because the boats were the same and continued to fish the same areas.

Fishing News: Friday 7th July 2000

Paying The Price

The principle guiding UK negotiations to join the EEC was 'swallow the lot and swallow it now', according to the official history of the talks. The account by Sir Con O'Neill the diplomat who led the negotiating team, says that what mattered was to get in...the negotiations were secondary concerned 'only with the means of achieving this objective at an acceptable price'. Civil servants observed a 'doctrine of accepting everything, unless a good case for some mitigation could be shown.'

This insight into Britain's vulnerability has lain in the vaults of the 'Foreign Office' for nearly 30 years. Over more than 300 pages, it chronicles 18 months of often painstaking negotiations which Sir Con judged to be largely successful. His official history has been kept secret because of the controversy invoked by the European issue and to avoid offending the French and other governments. Sir David Hannay, former British ambassador to the UN, who edited the account, said: 'This was considered to be a reasonably sensitive document and was treated as very restricted.'

Sir Con O'Neill acknowledged mistakes, in particular over the fishing talks. His account suggests that the negotiating team was poorly prepared and, to begin with, did not consider the matter to be important. 'We failed to foresee the way in which, and the intensity with which, political pressures on the question of fishing limits would develop,' he wrote. The consequences of letting European boats into British waters reverberate to this day. Economically, he wrote, it was 'peanuts', even if it was 'political dynamite'. Here is an extract from the report in Sir Con's words:

'Sea fisheries remain the only significant economic activity of developed countries which are a form not of harvesting or of processing, but of hunting. The feelings they arouse are ancient and deep. As a fisherman, I understand these feelings. If I ever find someone fishing a pool which by law, convention or comity I have a better right to fish at that moment, I experience sheer rage.'

I have no doubt that we made mistakes...The first was in not trying harder than we did to stop the adoption of a common fisheries policy. I believe we could have at least postponed such an agreement; and if we had, it is possible, though questionable, that we could have postponed it indefinitely. Almost a year later, we made a major mistake in putting the proposals we put to them on June 1, 1971.'



Comments on the Fishing Supplement...contents or 'attitude'...will be taken up in the next RHBOA Members Forum in the February 2001 issue of the Newsletter. Contributions should reach Peter Etherden, RHBOA's Magazine Editor, by 15th January 2001 at P.O. Box 36, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7ZE (Tel: 01797 226397), left with Connie on 'Vemara' at 'River Brede Moorings' or e-mailed to 'peteretherden@hotmail.com'.