Twitter Thread by John Lichfield



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Fish thread.
Having read the Brexit deal, I believe B. Johnson misled the nation on Thurs when he said Britain could catch "all the fish that it wants " in UK waters in 5 years' time. The clear presumption in the text is that EU fleets will have similar access after 2026.1/12

The UK fish industry will have to pay a high price in EU import tariffs if that access is withdrawn. Overall… the deal falls far short of the exaggerated "sea of opportunity" promises made to UK fishermen. 2/12

The headline quota compromise - reducing EU catches in the UK 200 mile zone by 25% over five and a half years – is balanced enough. But different fishers will study the small-print with delight OR anger. Some EU quotas will be cut more than others. 3/12

Fisheries, we were told, would be a big Brexit winner. No it won't. On this deal, the UK industry will certainly lose more from Brexit (no more frictionless access to the EU market) than it gains (incremental, extra quotas over the next 5 years). 4/12

First…the length of the deal. The 5 and 1/2 years of cuts in EU quotas/increases in UK quotas, are laid out in annexes to the main treaty. The last column says "2026 onwards" In other words, the presumption is there will be no further cuts in EU quotas after that date. 5/12

In the main fisheries part of the agreement, there is indeed talk of "annual negotiations" on sharing fish – something the UK govt had always insisted upon. But the opaque text can than be read in two (may be more) different ways. 6/12

The agreement says that the annual "consultations should normally result in each Party granting" the quotas shown in the annexes. In other words, there is a presumption of enduring shares after the 2021 -2026 25% cut - something that the EU had always insisted upon. 7/12

What happens if one side refuses or reduces access after June 2026? "Compensatory measures" can be imposed "commensurate to the economic and societal impact of the change". A joint tribunal will sit if necessary. The measures can include tariffs and tit for tat closures. 8/12

So Boris Johnson’s claim on Christmas Eve - that the UK will be “free to catch and eat as much fish as it likes from UK waters” after 2026 – is a slippery fib. We can close our waters but we would pay a heavy price for doing so in tariffs on fish exports to the EU. 9/12

That price would mostly be borne by the UK fisheries industry itself which relies heavily on exports to the EU market. The extra fish which UK has been given in the deal include some cod/haddock (that we like) but many more saithe/ hake (which we mostly sell to Fr and Sp). 10/12

In other words, if we take more fish after 2026, we might have nowhere to sell the extra fish we have already won. The deal recognises, in effect, what some people have been saying for years. Like it or not, the UK fishing industry is tangled up with Europe. 11/12

For those US fishermen who now depend on paper-free, low-regulation overnight sales of shellfish and crustaceans to the continent – about 30% of the while industry - this deal is only a partial relief at best. 11a/12

They will avoid the high tariffs that would have followed No Deal. But they will still be faced with cumbersome health checks now that the UK is leaving the seamless European single market.
Conclusion: we have been sold a basket of stinking mackerel and red herrings. 12/12