I congratulate my hon. Friend Zac Goldsmith on his tireless efforts to reduce fish discards.

All hon. Members understand the importance of fishing to our local economies, but I represent Brixham, which lands the highest-value catch in England. That represents more than £17 million for our local and national economy. That is real jobs, not just at sea but on land, and a very valuable export market.

I thank the fisheries Minister for his recent visit. He is now aware of Project 50%, which is being carried out in Brixham, to which many hon. Members have paid tribute. I should like to recognise the work of Darren Edwards, the net designer, and scientists at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. Shaun Gibbs, who presented the results of Project 50% to Maria Damanaki, and other trawlermen, have fitted cameras to their trawlers to monitor catches, so that we can get away from the existing quota system. They are taking part in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea area 7e sole catch quota trial.

I also recognise the work of south-west fish producers, who are working with the Government through the Fishing for the Markets project to look at how to achieve better sales for unusual fish, such as pout, whiting, gurnard and dragonet. I hesitate to give anyone cooking advice—my family certainly do not miss my cooking back at home—but all one has to do with gurnard is stick it in the oven with a bit of butter and rosemary. Nothing else is required, and it is absolutely delicious. I commend gurnard to the House!

Fisherman in Brixham and surrounding areas have made extensive efforts to reduce discards—all hon. Members will recognise that but we can imagine their frustration. They have reduced their fishing effort and taken part in a series of trials to reduce discards, at great personal cost, and improved the sustainability of the mixed fishery in the English channel, only to find that Dutch fly-draggers that have fished more than their quotas and destroyed their fishing grounds in the North sea are coming over and having the same impact in our waters. That is extremely demoralising for our fishermen.

The CFP is undoubtedly outdated and unsustainable, but we must be careful in how we implement measures on discards. I was reassured that the wording of the motion was altered so that we recognise that not all species that are thrown back into the sea die. My hon. Friend Sheryll Murray, who is very experienced, drew attention to the fact that if we landed all the crab that we catch, crab would become extinct, which is an important point. We must also recognise the efforts made in the lobster fisheries, which now notch rather than land buried, egg-bearing lobsters, which has greatly increased fish stocks locally. Therefore, we need to be careful in how we talk about discarding, and look at all the alternative measures that have been outlined, which I hope the Minister will consider.

I know that the Minister works tirelessly on behalf of our fishing industry, but we would also like to see some fairness. I am in the difficult position of representing both the under-10 and the over-10 metre fleets, which clearly have different needs, as we all recognise. However,
if we are to have fairness, their efforts must not be undermined by foreign vessels. I am sure that all Members would ask the Minister to press home the point in Europe that this is the only way forward. However, I know that many other Members wish to speak, so with that I will take my seat.

They Work For You

Hansard