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FISHING QUOTAS FLOUT THE SCIENCE

Do you think government ministers actually understand the value of science? How can they, when they ignore scientific advice time and again as if it's an optional extra?

The latest example is the UK's fisheries minister George Eustice, who took credit for negotiating "a triumph for Britain's dwindling fishing fleets" at recent fisheries meetings in Brussels.

What he actually negotiated was another nail in the coffin for Britain's dwindling fish stocks. The scientists advised him to maintain or reduce fishing quotas – on the basis there are too many European boats chasing too few fish – yet he did precisely the opposite.

The advice on cod, for example, was to cut quotas by 20 per cent. So what did Eustice and his colleagues do? They increased them by 5 per cent.

Fisheries ministers seem to view scientists with suspicion and annoyance, and since they don't have the guts to stand up to Europe's over-subsidised and over-sized fishing industry, they flout pretty much every shred of advice they

are given. In recent years, they have ignored it in roughly 9 out of every 10 of their decisions.

Science is there to help ministers make informed decisions – which seems quite important, given that they invariably know next to nothing about the subject themselves. Without science, there will be no proper regulations; without proper regulations, there will be no fish; and

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without fish, there will be no fishing. It's not hard.

A quote from the new European environment commissioner, Karmenu Vella, says it all. After the recent Brussels meetings, he admitted that many of the decisions on quotas were contrary to scientific advice: "We have worked with [ministers] to ensure that where we do not follow science, member states take the necessary decisions to avoid a disaster happening later," he said. What on Earth is he talking about? Is he planning to wave a magic wand?