

The government won't release its analyses of Brexit's impact. We have a right to see them



*The government has refused to publish its sector-by-sector analyses of the impact of Brexit, arguing that releasing them they would undermine its negotiating position. **Molly Scott Cato** (MEP for the South West) says businesspeople trying to plan for the future have a right to know what the likely effects of leaving the EU will be.*

It was, I thought, a fairly reasonable request, for an MEP representing five million constituents: has the government undertaken studies into the impacts of Brexit, and if so could it provide some key findings? After all, it is part of my elected responsibility to provide my constituents and their families; businesses and public services with information that can help them prepare for what will inevitably be the biggest economic and social transformation this country has seen in my lifetime.

In particular, I wanted to know if any studies have explored issues surrounding the economic impacts of leaving the single market and ending freedom of movement and, as an MEP representing the South West, what impacts are expected on farmers and rural communities.

I was prompted by leaked documents revealing that under such a 'hard Brexit' scenario the NHS could be [short of 40,000 nurses by 2026](#) as well as reports that dozens of other impact assessments have been carried out by the Government into its chosen course of leaving not just the EU, but the single market.

The [response from government](#) was an acknowledgement that they have indeed "conducted analysis of over 50 sectors" but they failed to inform me which sectors, let alone any findings. The [argument against publication](#) is that it would undermine the Government's ability to negotiate the best deal for Britain. Yet the leaking of the report into the impacts on the NHS has had no discernible effect on the government's negotiation position. What stands in the way of progress in the Brexit discussions is the government's own intransigence or lack of clarity over issues such as the 'divorce settlement', the Irish border and the rights of EU citizen's post-Brexit. If 'take back control' from 'Brussels bureaucrats' means anything, it should mean a new commitment to openness and transparency, with evidence-based decision making, and that evidence being available to the public and their democratic representatives.



Tight-lipped ... mussels in North Devon. Photo: [Davina Ware](#) via a [CC-BY-SA 2.0 licence](#)

But it is a wonder that the government needed to carry out these studies at all. In 2013, the coalition government commissioned the 'most extensive analysis ever undertaken of the UK's relationship with the EU'. The '[Review of the balance of competences](#)' took 2300 pieces of written evidence – submitted by experts, NGOs, businesses, members of Parliament, the public and other interested parties – and pulled them together into 32 reports. These covered issues such as economic and monetary policy, health, environment and climate change, fundamental rights and education and vocational training and youth.

While the reports provided some useful pointers on areas for reform, such as better EU regulation and the need for more effective implementation and enforcement of existing legislation, the overall conclusion was that membership of the EU was positive for the UK. It also highlighted how successful the UK has often been in shaping the EU's agenda and legislation.

On the [UK's membership of the single market](#), the review noted that 'most studies suggest that the GDP of both the EU and the UK are appreciably greater than they otherwise would be, thanks to economic integration through the Single Market'. It concluded that, 'integration has brought to the EU, and hence to the UK, in most if not all observers' opinions, appreciable economic benefits'. These findings are borne out by the responses I have had from businesses who have beaten a path to my door in the past year to explain the disastrous impact on them of the government's Brexit plans.

I began with a tour of North Devon, where the dominant sectors are agriculture, food and tourism. All three rely heavily on EU labour and have no idea how they could survive without it. For them, freedom of movement is an economic lifeline, not the threat to British jobs portrayed by the tabloid headlines.

Then it was finance and automotive – not two sectors I expected to be championing as a Green MEP. However, both sectors employ thousands in South West England. There are [at least 75,000 finance-related jobs](#) and the sector is especially important to Bournemouth, Swindon and Bristol. Their trade body brought them together for a conference in Bristol where we were also joined by Trade Minister Mark Garnier. When I explained about the impact of the withdrawal of the [EU banking passport](#), and the problems with establishing equivalence of regulations to ensure the right to continue selling financial products, faces in the room turned visibly pale.

For the car industry, it's [the plan to leave the customs union](#) that leaves them weak at the knees, as explained to me by Honda's EU policy representative. It would mean time-consuming checks and paperwork as components were forced to pass across currently open borders.

So still we wait to see what sectors the government has studied, and whether the findings of these studies are in any way different to the extensive analysis carried out in 2013. We must assume they won't be. In which case, the evidence available, and in the public domain, suggests we are in fact better off inside, rather than outside, the EU.

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor the LSE.

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