

## THE AUSTRALIAN

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# British minister in France for talks on fishing row

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AFP

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Britain's Brexit minister is due in Paris Thursday for talks on the fishing rights crisis that has further strained already tense relations between the two countries.

The meeting comes a day after a French court released a British trawler impounded for a week as part of the deepening dispute.

Frost is a staunch defender of Brexit while Beaune is a close ally of President Emmanuel Macron, not shy of making clear his belief that France should not pay for what he sees as Britain's mistake of leaving the EU.

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said there would also be a European Commission meeting on the issue during a visit by Frost on Friday, but this is yet to be confirmed by Brussels.

On Wednesday evening, the impounded trawler, the Cornelis Gert Jan, left the French northern port of Le Havre after receiving permission to leave, an AFP correspondent said.

But the lawyer for the ship's captain, Mathieu Croix, told AFP a court in the nearby city of Rouen had allowed it to leave without posting any financial guarantee.

"It is a good decision, of a kind that will allow the tensions to drop," said the lawyer. "French justice is independent from political pressure," he added.

The captain still faces a trial in Le Havre on August 11, 2022 on charges of non-authorized

fishing in French waters by a boat from outside the European Union, which carry a maximum fine of 75,000 euros (\$87,000).

The dispute over post-Brexit fishing rights has strained already troubled relations between Paris and London following Britain's exit from the European Union and has threatened to escalate into a full-blown trade war.

Attal emphasised that "all options were on the table" regarding future sanctions after Macron put off implementing trade sanctions to give the talks a chance.

Under a deal agreed by Britain and the EU late last year, European fishing vessels can continue to ply UK waters if they can prove they operated there in the past.

The total volumes affected are tiny in terms of overall France-UK bilateral trade.

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