



Select Committee on the European Union

International Agreements Sub-Committee

Oral evidence: UK-Australia Trade Negotiations

Wednesday 21 October 2020

4 pm

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Goldsmith (The Chair); Lord Foster of Bath; Lord Gold; Lord Kerr of Kinlochard; Lord Lansley; Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke; Lord Morris of Aberavon; Lord Robathan; The Earl of Sandwich; Lord Watts.

Evidence Session No. 1

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 1 - 10

Witnesses

I: His Excellency the Hon George Brandis QC, High Commissioner for Australia to the United Kingdom; Simon Smalley, Minister-Counsellor (Agriculture), Australian High Commission; Stephen Dietz, First Secretary (Trade), Australian High Commission.

Examination of witnesses

George Brandis, Simon Smalley and Stephen Dietz.

Q1 **The Chair:** Good afternoon. This is a session of the International Agreements Sub-Committee of the European Union Committee. It is part of our inquiry into the arrangements proposed with Australia. This afternoon, I am delighted to welcome, from the Australian high commission: the high commissioner himself, the honourable George Brandis QC; the minister-counsellor for agriculture, Mr Simon Smalley; and the first secretary for trade, Mr Stephen Dietz.

This session is being broadcast. We will take a transcript and you will have the opportunity to review it before it is finalised. Please also note that members might declare relevant interests prior to asking questions, although those ought to be brief. Before I start with the first question, I understand that you would like to make a short opening statement, which we look forward to hearing.

George Brandis: May I thank the members of the Committee for this opportunity? I wish to make a few preliminary comments to set the scene. The Australian Government will provide, in coming days, a written submission setting out and reinforcing some of the points that will, I expect, emerge in answers to questions. If there are questions of a technical or scientific character in particular, rather than taking up the time of the Committee we would prefer to respond to such questions in the written submission.

The Chair: That is understood.

George Brandis: Australia and the United Kingdom have always enjoyed a significant and vibrant relationship, underpinned by our shared heritage, our common values and our closely aligned strategic outlook. The United Kingdom is also one of Australia's most significant economic partners, our fifth-largest trading partner and our second-largest investment partner. However, unlike in practically every other aspect of our relationship, where we are bound together about as tightly as can be, trade is the one area where we have scope to move significantly closer. The Australia-UK FTA will be the missing piece in the bilateral jigsaw puzzle, with the potential to deepen our trade and investment relationship for the benefit of businesses, workers and consumers in both our countries.

Both the Governments of both Australia and the United Kingdom have committed to negotiating an ambitious, high-quality FTA. The conclusion of such an agreement will send an important signal of both countries' commitment to free trade and to the rules-based trading system, while further undergirding and reinforcing our already very close and strong relationship.

As your Lordships will be aware, the negotiations for the UK-Australia FTA commenced some months ago, and round 3 of the negotiations is due to commence on 23 November. I have had reports from the Australian side,

and am told anecdotally by the UK side, that there is a high level of satisfaction with the progress of the negotiations. That is not to say that there are not sensitive areas, because in free trade agreement negotiations there are always areas that are easier than others.

The true test of ambition for this FTA is whether it will provide a pathway to tariff and quota-free trade between our two countries across the board. That is no more than what the United Kingdom has had for decades with the EU and it remains, as we understand it, the objective for the United Kingdom's post-Brexit relationship with Europe, the world's largest agricultural producer and exporter. The relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom deserves no less.

There is an extraordinary amount of political will behind this FTA on the part of both Governments, and a high degree of trust between the negotiators. Both recognise that there is much to gain on both sides. This FTA will be the next chapter in the story of our two nations. I trust that the discussion and evidence this afternoon can elaborate upon some of the key issues that may be on the minds of your Lordships, so that the matter can be progressed further.

Q2 The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that statement. I welcome what you said, particularly about the strength of political will and high degree of trust between our two countries. When I and my colleagues ask these questions, please feel free to pass them to your colleagues, who may intervene if they want to. You said that, if there are technical questions, you may want to have those dealt with in writing afterwards. That is entirely understood. Those will be made public in the same way as this evidence will be.

You mentioned that there is much to gain for both sides from this proposed agreement. I wonder if you could outline for us what the benefits would be for the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to SMEs, and what, for both sides, will be the benefit from the deal.

George Brandis: Australia is and has been for several decades a free trading nation. Both sides of Australian politics, going back to the 1980s, have embraced free trade as a good thing in itself. Australia has been the beneficiary of that. In the last seven years, the proportion of our trade that we export to countries with which we have free trade or preferential trade agreements has risen from 26% to over 70%.

The prosperity of modern Australia over the last several decades, under Governments on both sides of politics, is in large part acknowledged to be the product of the fact that we have been a free trading nation. The benefit to the United Kingdom that we Australians see is the simple proposition, at the most general level, that the rising tide lifts all boats. The degree of prosperity that Australia has enjoyed from free trade can be a prosperity also enjoyed by the United Kingdom as it embraces global free trade as a core policy objective.

About 30 chapters of text are being exchanged between the negotiating teams, one of which is directed specifically to SMEs. We see huge prospects for the United Kingdom, because most of your manufacturing, especially in the Midlands and the north, is conducted by SMEs. Although both countries will benefit from the free trade agreement, where those benefits fall will in part be a function of the structure and shape of our respective economies. The UK economy has a proportionally larger manufacturing base than the Australian economy. We are primarily a services and commodities economy. Most of the UK manufacturing base is in the hands of SMEs, so we see huge opportunities, especially in the manufacturing sector although not exclusively, for your SMEs arising from this FTA.

The Chair: We are well aware that Australia has a federal constitution. Tell us a little about how the Australian Government will consult with their regional governments as part of the ratification process, when we get to it. How long would you expect that consultation process to take?

George Brandis: Trade negotiations are conducted by the Australian Government, not by state or territory governments. Nevertheless, there is a very thorough process of consultation, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In the Australian system, our equivalents of the Foreign Office and the Department for International Trade are merged into one.

The department and those who lead this negotiation consult extensively with state and territory governments on their particular interests in the progression of these negotiations. The adoption by Australia of a trade agreement does not depend upon any process of adoption by the several state and territory parliaments. However, it does depend upon the acceptance and adoption of the agreement by a committee of the federal Parliament, called the joint standing committee on treaties.

Inevitably, the operationalisation of a trade agreement will require amendment to domestic legislation, which needs to be passed by both Houses of the Australian Parliament. The upper House of the Australian Parliament, the Senate, is a parliamentary chamber that was conceived as representing primarily the interests of the states and in which the states have equality of representation, essentially based on the American Senate model. Although we do not have a process of treaty ratification by the Parliament in the way the American Senate ratifies treaties, we rely upon the adoption of enabling legislation by the Parliament, including that parliamentary chamber that specifically represents the interests of the states.

The Chair: We heard a bit about JSCOT earlier in our inquiry. We were interested in its working practices.

Q3 **Lord Watts:** Good afternoon, gentlemen. As the UK seeks to establish itself as a prominent member of the WTO, which areas of international trade can the UK and Australia best work together on jointly?

George Brandis: I can hardly exaggerate how enthusiastic Australia is to be joined at the WTO by the United Kingdom as a free trading voice in its own right. Australia has historically been a very active member of the WTO. We have been active in reform of the governance of the WTO, including the appellate procedure. Australia is the co-chair, with Singapore and Japan, of the joint statement initiative on e-commerce, a negotiation of 85 WTO members to establish the world's first digital trade rules. We are the chair of the Cairns Group of the WTO, which is the principal group leading reform of agricultural trade. On fisheries, Australia, as a maritime nation like the UK, has been very active.

Governance, digital trade, agricultural trade and fisheries are four particular instances I can give of Australia being a leading voice at the WTO and looking forward to joining with the United Kingdom to pursue likeminded interests in those and other areas.

Lord Watts: How much will the membership of the UK and the joint efforts of the UK and Australia shift the agenda of reform?

George Brandis: It will shift it in a positive direction. It is very hard to say in advance of the UK assuming full membership of the WTO, but we take very seriously Prime Minister Johnson's commitment that the United Kingdom wishes to be a powerful voice for global free trade. We understand that it is deeply felt and sincerely meant. The United Kingdom, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and an influential global citizen in many other core international fora, has worked for years with likeminded partners, including Australia, in those fora. We expect nothing less in relation to the WTO. I would flag in particular, because it has been flagged by your Prime Minister, reform of WTO governance.

Q4 **Lord Kerr of Kinlochard:** Thank you very much for being with us, High Commissioner. It is very good to see you. I would like to ask you to take us through the interrelationship between our negotiation with you and your negotiation with the EU. Presumably, before round 3 of your negotiation with us, and certainly before round 9 of your negotiation with the EU, you will know the future relationship between the UK and the EU. It looks as if there are two possibilities: first, a free trade agreement, probably goods only, with no cumulation of rules of origin; secondly, no deal, with the UK and the EU imposing tariffs on each other's trade. In scenario 1, how would that affect your negotiation with us? In scenario 2, how would that affect your negotiation with us and your negotiation with the EU?

George Brandis: As you rightly say, you are negotiating your terms of trade with the EU after 31 December. We wait to see the outcome of that. Australia is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with the EU, where we are about to engage in the ninth round of our negotiations, and we are negotiating the FTA with you. To the extent possible, we would prefer to think of them separately. Because I am not involved in the negotiations between Australia and the EU, I want to be very careful

in my answer, so as not to create any problems or false expectations for those negotiations.

That said, the level of ambition for an Australia-UK free trade agreement is very high. The level of expectation that an Australia-UK free trade agreement can be concluded soon is also high, for good reason. Our negotiations with the EU have been going for longer than our negotiations with the UK. The Australia-EU negotiation is, naturally, a more complex negotiation and we do not want the one to impinge upon or inhibit the other, but they do bear upon one another. The nature of the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union arising from either of the alternative scenarios that you have posited will also potentially bear upon our bilateral FTA.

I see you smiling, Lord Kerr. I think you are acknowledging that I have answered that question in a very guarded way. That is not because I want to be unresponsive but because I do not want, in anything I might say to this Committee, to impede or impinge upon what Australia is currently negotiating with the European Union.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard: I am applauding a splendidly diplomatic answer. What is your preference for the conclusion of these agreements? I imagine that you plan and hope to conclude your agreement with us in either scenario first, before the conclusion of your agreement with the EU. Is that true?

George Brandis: The Australian Government has no official position on which we would prefer to conclude sooner. We would like to conclude them both as soon as a high-quality agreement can be concluded. That said, there is generally an expectation that we are closer to concluding the Australia-UK FTA than the Australia-EU FTA.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard: Will it be easier or more difficult to conclude in one or other of the scenarios I depicted for the relationship between Britain and the EU?

George Brandis: I cannot usefully respond affirmatively to either of those propositions, with all due respect. I emphasise that there is such a high level of political will on the part of both your Government and mine in relation to this bilateral agreement, and fewer complexities in the negotiation of the Australia-UK FTA, that we think this can be done and finalised, with no prejudice to the quality of the agreement, quite soon.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard: That is splendid. You get a gold medal in fencing, High Commissioner.

Lord Foster of Bath: High Commissioner and colleagues, thank you very much for being with us. I want to ask a very basic question on tariff rate quotas, but I should warn you that my colleague Lord Lansley will follow with a rather more specific one. As you know, last year, Australia joined with a number of other countries in seeking compensation for loss of market access because of the way TRQs will be divided between the UK

and the EU post Brexit. More recently, your Minister for Trade, Simon Birmingham, talking of quotas for products such as buffalo, sugar and many other things, said, "The Australian Government is negotiating with the UK and the EU to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome". My question is very simple: how are those negotiations going?

George Brandis: They are, I am advised, going well. They are going on in Geneva as we speak. I believe they are going on this very week. That is another negotiation, quite apart from the Australia-EU negotiation, that bears somewhat on the topic we are currently discussing. The objective of the negotiators is to have that negotiation done before 31 December, but it may be overtaken, as concerns the UK, by the Australia-UK free trade agreement, if that can be accomplished very soon. For similar reasons to those I gave in response to Lord Kerr, it would not be appropriate for me to reflect on the minutiae of negotiations to which I am not a party and that are being undertaken by Australian negotiators currently.

Lord Foster of Bath: Not having a medal in fencing, unlike Lord Kerr, I will not pursue it further, but I should be interested to hear how you get on with Lord Lansley.

Q5 **Lord Lansley:** I am very grateful to you, High Commissioner, and your colleagues for being with us this afternoon. It is very good to have you here.

I wondered if you might outline what you hope to achieve with regard to agricultural market access in the UK.

George Brandis: As I said in the opening statement, Australia looks to this FTA to achieve an outcome of zero quotas and zero tariffs for all goods. That, from the Australian point of view, is a pure and best FTA. We understand that there will be sensitivities, and that is why we have a negotiation. The Australian position and ambition is tariff and quota-free trade between our countries, including in agriculture. To reinforce the point, that is what you are seeking from the EU in your negotiation with it. We consider that Australia deserves no less than what you are asking of the EU.

Lord Lansley: By way of interests, I should declare on the record that my sister-in-law is a Welsh hill farmer and producer of Welsh lamb. Can you comment on tariff rate quotas, in particular seasonal tariff rate quotas? With some sensitive agricultural products, it has been suggested that there might be complementarity between seasonal products and, therefore, that one might have a seasonal tariff rate quota for them. Is that something you are presently considering?

George Brandis: Once again, I do not want to get ahead of where the negotiators are at, so there is a limit to what I can say. Given sensitivities in this economy, and in particular sectors of this economy, we will need to consider the ways in which we reach the virtuous outcome of zero-tariff, zero-quota access on goods, including, of course, agricultural goods. It is a feature of this discussion, particularly when it comes to

agriculture, that our two countries are counterseasonal. You gave the example of the Welsh lamb market. There are times in the year, I am advised, around Christmas, when there are shortages in the supply of certain cuts of lamb in your market. Australia, being counterseasonal, is in a position to supply some agricultural commodities, of which lamb is one, to this market at times of seasonal shortage.

Q6 Lord Morris of Aberavon: I am interested in lamb. I hate the term "sheep meat". I come from a family that has, for centuries, been breeding Welsh lamb. To my knowledge, the slightest change in volume can have a substantial effect on our domestic market prices. I take your point about seasonal variations. Is there any room for adjustment without upsetting our domestic demand and prices, so far as Australia and the UK are concerned?

George Brandis: Again, I need to be careful not to anticipate a negotiation that is current and not concluded. That said, in free trade agreements, one of the ways in which sensitivities are adjusted to is by introducing new tariffs, tariff lines or tariff levels, reciprocally of course down to zero over time, as we would wish to see it. That is a very common practice.

I have spoken to a lot of sheep meat producers. We do not consider that Australian lamb imports to your market, of which there are some at the moment but very few, are likely to be a threat to your producers. For the beef and sheep meat it produces in very large volume, Australia already exports under supply contracts to our own region: Indonesia, east Asia, Japan, Korea, China and south-east Asia. The availability of lamb to this market, even if we reached a zero-tariff, zero-quota position, is likely to be very limited, and limited to supplying counterseasonal shortages and the luxury market.

Q7 Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke: It is good to see you, High Commissioner. I want to take up a question from Lord Lansley about agricultural market access. You will have seen, in the press and in public discourse, the strength of feeling about phytosanitary goods and the protection of animal welfare. I am a bit puzzled as to how you get to a complete agreement on agriculture when a lot of the regulation is being done by the states and territories, not by the federal Government. I wonder how you will manage that. Secondly, I was delighted to hear you say that there would be no tariffs or quotas for all goods. Does that include Scotch whisky?

George Brandis: Baroness Liddell, our outcome is no tariffs or quotas for all goods, and that applies to both sides. As it happens, and as you would know as a former high commissioner to Australia, Scotch whisky is one of the great commodity exports from the United Kingdom to Australia, but there is still a relatively modest tariff on it. The answer to your question, at least if we can achieve the perfect free trade agreement that we would like to achieve, is yes, in relation to Scotch whisky and other beverages.

More generally, you raised the question of regulation by the states. As you well know as a former high commissioner to Australia, the states and territories regulate a lot of agriculture, but so does the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth—the national Government—in particular controls export licences. We will always meet your standards in anything we export to you, just as we will expect you to meet our standards in anything you export to us.

You mentioned animal welfare. An international certifying body of animal welfare standards, the World Organisation for Animal Health, has a certification system in which it certifies countries' compliance against various metrics and international standards for animal welfare, health and well-being. Australia subjected itself to that certification process in 2015. On a five-point scale, of which 5 was the best score and 1 was the worst score, Australia was certified at 5. For animal welfare standards, we received, as it were, the gold medal from the international certifying body, so I point to that. As a general proposition, we will always meet your standards, as we would expect you to meet ours.

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke: I am a bit confused about the standards that you are saying Australia is meeting. I have here the animal protection index, which gives the UK a B grade and Australia a D grade. I am not an expert in these things, so I cannot dissect them, but it is something that I would happily take some time to look into. My concern, shared by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the National Farmers' Union and the British Veterinary Association, is that we have radically different standards in an awful lot of areas. For example, we got rid of battery hens in 2012, but Australia still has them. I do not want to get into this argument now, because there may be other opportunities, but it is a concern to me and to those who look at these issues in more detail and with more knowledge than I have.

George Brandis: We will provide, in writing, a detailed and particular response to the issue you have raised. Simon Smalley, the agricultural counsellor who is with me, is a scholar of that particular survey to which you have referred.

Simon Smalley: The animal protection index, in looking at standards for animal welfare, biases its thinking towards whether you have national laws. In Australia, because we are a federation with a written constitution that provides for animal welfare to be dealt with by our state governments, we do not have a head of power to have federal laws on animal welfare. As the High Commissioner says, the international standard-setting body under the World Trade Organization, which is the World Organisation for Animal Health, has assessed us on the basis of how competent we are in achieving animal welfare outcomes and rate us top class.

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke: I am no expert in these things and I bow to an expert, but these issues will be returned to. I will bow out with a comment on Scotch whisky. Your tariff on Scotch whisky is the highest of all your beverage tariffs. It rankled when I was in Australia and it still

rankles, but I will leave you to it.

George Brandis: When we do this free trade agreement, it will be zero.

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke: Good, I will hold you to that.

The Chair: That is a promise, Baroness Liddell. Perhaps you could exercise some influence over the next President of the United States, whoever that may be, on Scotch whisky.

The Earl of Sandwich: High Commissioner, you will probably accuse me of rubbing it in, because I am following Baroness Liddell's question and my question is still on animal welfare. She has quoted the animal protection index and we have heard some reassurances, but there is a lot of concern that there is little legislation in Australia, the codes are not binding and some states do not meet the OIE codes on beef, chicken and dairy. She mentioned the issue of confining animals. We know that transport and slaughter methods are good, but you are probably aware of the weight of evidence and we are still waiting for those answers. It would be interesting to know what progress was made, because I know that some of the progress is within states and every state will differ.

George Brandis: As I say, we will meet your standards in any product we export to this market. I know you spoke about this in the debate on the Bill. We will give you a very detailed and particular response, taking into account, among other things, what was said about regulation at state level. The national Government controls exports and certifies agricultural products for export, so in that derivative way it does have control, even though, Australia being a federation, as in Canada and in most federations I can think of, the regulation of agriculture is done at a state or provincial level.

Q8 **Lord Gold:** Good afternoon, High Commissioner and colleagues. Thank you very much for joining us today. I am sure you will be pleased to be leaving the farm now for easier subjects: financial and professional services. These have been raised as areas where both sides could benefit from closer co-operation, for example in mutual recognition of qualifications. As a lawyer, I have seen some wonderful Australian lawyers come and practise in the City of London. Making it easier for that to happen is something that I know the City of London would like to see out of these negotiations. What are Australia's key objectives in these areas?

George Brandis: Thank you for what you say about Australian lawyers. Both Stephen Dietz and I are Australian lawyers, so that is very flattering. It is hard to walk down a corridor in one of the golden circle law firms in the City of London without running into a young Australian lawyer. The services economy is very, very important. It is a very big part of this deal. At the moment, the two-way trade in services between Australia and the United Kingdom makes the United Kingdom Australia's third-largest services trading partner. Both sides are ambitious, in financial services and professional services, to go further.

One area that is being very actively canvassed in the negotiations that are under way at the moment, which I am told is not an area of contention at all but an area of very strong agreement, is easier mutual recognition of professional qualifications, not only for lawyers but for accountants, doctors, nurses and other professionals.

There will also be a financial services chapter in the free trade agreement. I know that that is a particular area of great interest to Secretary of State Truss. You have identified an area, Lord Gold, where there is nothing but upside, particularly in the professions, where many people from the United Kingdom come to live and work in Australia, and vice versa. That would be a very important and popular element of this deal.

Lord Gold: That is very good to hear. I hope that can be achieved. I know that many people will welcome that, so thank you very much for what you have said.

The Chair: I should declare myself as a lawyer whose firm employs Australian lawyers, too. I share your sentiments about the quality of Australian lawyers, as the high commissioner already knows.

Q9 **Lord Foster of Bath:** Since we are all declaring interests, I should perhaps point out that my son so loves Australia that he has now become an Australian citizen.

You will be well aware, High Commissioner, that the creative industries are a very important part of the UK economy. Referring to something you said earlier, there are within it a very large number of SMEs. We are a successful exporter. In fact, Australia is the third-largest export destination, for instance for UK TV. You referred earlier to your work in the WTO on digital trade. This is an area where we can work together and develop our work, alongside intellectual property issues. I wonder if you could outline your hopes for the deal in relation to digital trade and intellectual property.

George Brandis: We have very high hopes. What I said to Lord Gold in relation to professional services I could say in relation to digital trade. That is a high ambition for both countries. There has been a high level of agreement in the negotiations thus far, I am advised, in relation to it. Australia recently concluded a digital trade agreement with Singapore, which we think is a world's best practice digital trade agreement. Both the ministers are ambitious to take the digital trade chapter of our FTA even beyond the Australia-Singapore FTA. This is not a contentious area; it is an area of very warm enthusiasm for both.

Lord Foster of Bath: I am delighted to hear it, but, of course, we have a number of concerns. One example is the rights that people have to make use of copyright material. You have much greater freedoms than we would have in the UK—more similar, for instance, to the fair-dealing arrangements in the United States. That would be an area of great concern, so I hope there will be an opportunity to address those issues. Perhaps not now but in the notes you will send us you could pick up some

of the areas where there is continuing concern.

George Brandis: I certainly will. As you will be aware, Australia's intellectual property law is based on the United Kingdom's. The two nations have developed over the years in slightly different ways. We aim to achieve an outcome on digital trade, and intellectual property in particular, that facilitates trade and investment while balancing the legitimate interests of rights-holders, users and the general public. If one of the fruits of this free trade agreement can be closer configuration of our intellectual property laws in ways that respect appropriately and balance those respective interests, that will be a very good outcome indeed.

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke: I feel I need to declare an interest. I am a non-executive director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, which, pandemic permitting, would have been playing in London this evening.

Q10 **Lord Robathan:** High Commissioner, may I start by saying how very encouraged I am by your optimistic and, for me, very sensible assessment of the way the trade negotiations are going? You were talking about Scotch whisky. Does the EU, and therefore do we, currently have a tariff on Australian wine?

George Brandis: Yes, it does. Do we know the level?

Stephen Dietz: It varies, depending on the particular wine. It is relatively low, but there is a tariff on wine under the EU common external tariff.

Lord Robathan: It is very encouraging to hear that we will lose the tariffs on Australian wine, of which I drink probably more than I should. A more substantive question relates to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which started nearly two years ago. The UK Government have said that they wish to join that and see a free trade agreement with Japan, and subsequently, we hope, with you and New Zealand, as a step in that direction. How would you view this? After all, it is slightly counterintuitive that we, an island in the Atlantic, should be joining a Pacific free trade agreement. What benefits would it bring to the UK?

George Brandis: With respect, it is counterintuitive only because of the nomenclature. It all depends, I guess, on how wide your horizons are.

Lord Robathan: They are very wide.

George Brandis: We embrace global Britain as a vision of a Britain that has a significant trading premise in every hemisphere, north, south, east and west. It may be that, after Britain accedes to the CPTPP, it has to be renamed, but that is the least of our concerns.

We have said this before and it has been the subject of a formal announcement earlier this year by the Australian Government. We support British accession to the CPTPP as a matter of principle. We

encourage it and we think it is a desirable thing. That said, there will be a negotiation, when Secretary of State Truss makes the formal application, with 11 counterparties. Like our negotiation with the EU, it will be a more complicated process, but having secured bilateral FTAs with Japan, Australia and New Zealand will assist Britain in the process.

At the moment, the CPTPP represents an area of more than 13% of global commerce. When the United Kingdom joins, it will approach 20%. The CPTPP trade area eliminates 98% of tariffs for the 11 member countries, whose combined GDP is more than £7.5 trillion. It is a great opportunity for the United Kingdom both in terms of reach into the other hemisphere and in terms of the volume of trade. In a very important way, it will advance Britain's global trade agenda beyond the bilateral agreements about which we have been talking today. We are all in favour of Britain joining the CPTPP and we see nothing but upside for you.

Lord Robathan: That is very encouraging again. Thank you very much. I suppose we could call it the trans-Pacific and Atlantic partnership. That would be more accurate.

On the same issue, although this is slightly tangential, President Trump withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership back in 2016. As you may have spotted, an election is about to take place in the United States, and nobody can predict the outcome. Were President Biden to win, would you expect the Americans—this is a matter of opinion, really—to wish to rejoin?

George Brandis: I do not want to make a prediction about that. When the United States withdrew from what was then called the TPP, there was a discussion among the remaining 11 members as to whether to proceed with the project. That was led by the then Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, the then Japan Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, and the then New Zealand Prime Minister, John Key. They decided to proceed and it was the right decision. When they decided to proceed, they did so in such a way as always to leave the door open for a future American Administration to reverse their position and join the CPTPP. At some stage down the track, although I am not predicting under whom or when, it would be good if that could happen.

The Chair: I suppose there is less need to change the name in those circumstances, but Lord Robathan has a name ready for you. High Commissioner, I thank you and your colleagues very much indeed for giving this very helpful evidence. I will declare this public session closed in a moment. Members of the Committee will be continuing in a private session. We are conscious that you promised some additional information in the written statement that you mentioned in opening, and we look forward to that. Thank you very much indeed.