



International Trade Committee

14 Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NB
Tel.: 020 7219 1318 E-mail: tradecom@parliament.uk

Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Leader of the House of Commons
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

28 April 2022

Dear Mark,

I wanted to write to you, further to the letter from the Secretary of State for International Trade following her evidence before my Committee yesterday,¹ which she kindly shared with me. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State's letter did not go as far as we expected – given her statements yesterday – so I am writing to further clarify our position, and what was discussed yesterday.

For us to produce full reports that meaningfully inform the House's debate on any new free trade agreements (FTAs), it is necessary and appropriate for us to consider and include the Government's report on the FTA, required under Section 42 of the Agriculture Act 2020.² To do this, we need time before the 21 sitting day 'CRaG' period is triggered.³

As you will know from the recent correspondence I have copied you into, we have been asking for a guaranteed minimum of 15 sitting days between the Government publishing its 'Section 42' report on an FTA and triggering the CRaG period. The Secretary of State has previously committed to ensuring we have time to publish our report before triggering CRaG,⁴ but has rejected our specific request.

In the Committee's evidence session, we asked the Secretary of State about our request for the 15 sitting days with you, and she offered to write to you. However, it was our understanding that she would not just convey our strong views, but also support them. In particular, she said she was "very comfortable" to do so, as long as the related legislation was "not destabilised by the timetabling",⁵ and that she would set out that the 15 days were "important for scrutiny".⁶ The Secretary of State also said she would "Absolutely" be happy to give us the time requested if she were "100% in control of the process".⁷

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/10143/html/>

² [Agriculture Act 2020, section 42](#)

³ [Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, Part 2](#)

⁴ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State to Mr Speaker outlining the Government's approach to presenting the UK–Australia Free Trade Agreement to Parliament, dated 3 December 2021](#)

⁵ [Q215](#)

⁶ [Q214](#)

⁷ [Q229](#)

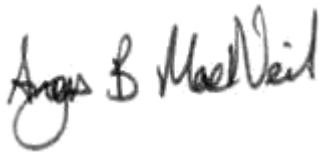
Following the session, the Secretary of State wrote to me and clarified that the “passage of the primary legislation is a separate process to CRaG”.⁸ This suggests that the timing of legislation should not prevent the Government from giving my Committee the assurance we seek around having enough time to publish our report before the CRaG period is triggered.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that you will support Parliamentary scrutiny of new FTAs by enabling my Committee to proceed with the assurance that we will have the requested 15 sitting days, wherever this may come under your responsibilities as Leader of the House of Commons.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for International Trade, as well as the Chairs of the International Agreements Committee, the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I am additionally copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, and the Chair of the Liaison Committee.

In accordance with our usual practice, this letter, along with any replies, will be published on the Committee’s webpage.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angus B MacNeil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Angus Brendan MacNeil
Chair of the International Trade Committee

⁸ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State regarding free trade agreement scrutiny, dated 27 April 2022](#)