



International Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State for International Trade
Department for International Trade
Old Admiralty Building
Admiralty Place
London
SW1A 2BL

31 May 2022

Dear Anne-Marie,

I am deeply concerned by how hard it has proven to arrange a suitable time for the Government to give evidence on the UK-Australia free trade agreement (FTA) over the past weeks and months, and again seek your prompt intervention. The lack of flexibility or respect your department continues to show my Committee and – by extension – Parliament is frustrating and disappointing, yet sadly unsurprising.

I wrote to you on 31 March,¹ calling you to give evidence on the FTA on 28 April from 10am to midday. Despite the deadline for response of a week, we only received your refusal to attend on 22 April via your officials. Since then, this Committee has gone out of its way to make time for you to give evidence, even as your officials continued to offer less than the time required, offering various possible times across three days,² then three more days and offering to see a junior minister instead. When this failed to produce any result, I appealed again to you, to “direct your officials and ministers to unblock this issue”.³

Yesterday, I was astonished to hear that your officials have said that the only time they or you will make yourself available is Monday 20 June, 10am to 11.30am, even when our Clerk made clear that this is neither a convenient nor sufficient time. After all the flexibility and good will my Committee has shown, it seems that we are being told every single meeting you and your ministers have across the next four sitting weeks is more important than making two hours available to give evidence to us.

This FTA is hugely important – not just as the first full new agreement the Government has negotiated since leaving the EU, but also for what it means for UK business and consumers, and for future negotiations. The Government has made a great deal of this FTA, yet you seem unwilling to give evidence for just two hours at a suitable time. This gives the clear impression that – at best – our scrutiny, as a Parliamentary Select Committee, is the least of your priorities, to be fitted in only if you have time after everything else, or – at worst – you want to avoid scrutiny of an

¹ [Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State relating to Australia free trade agreement timings, dated 31 March 2022](#)

² [Correspondence with the Secretary of State regarding giving evidence on the UK-Australia free trade agreement, dated 5 May 2022](#)

³ [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State regarding following up on Australia Free Trade Agreement evidence, 12 May 2022](#)

FTA you say is a good deal for all. Either option is clearly unacceptable, and sets a dangerous precedent for future FTA scrutiny.

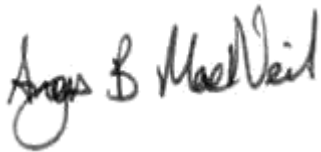
Official-level private conversations have clearly been unable to resolve this matter in a mutually-acceptable fashion. Consequently, I must ask you to respond personally to this letter either in writing or by speaking with me directly, with options for an evidence session, by the end of Tuesday 7 June.

We cannot continue to operate under this continuing level of uncertainty and delay, and Parliament must have sufficient time to consider our findings before the debate we will be seeking on our report and the FTA.

I am copying this letter to the Chairs of the International Agreements Committee, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and the Liaison Committee. I am additionally copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, and the Leader of the House.

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' and 'M'.

Angus Brendan MacNeil
Chair of the International Trade Committee