



**LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL  
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS  
THE RT HON MARK SPENCER MP**



Angus Brendan MacNeil MP  
Chair of the International Trade Committee

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chair of the Liaison Committee

Our Ref: MS/NMP2559  
18th July 2022

*Dear Sir Bernard and Angus*

Thank you for your recent letters on the scrutiny of the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement, requesting an extension to the CRaG process and a debate on a substantive motion during the process. I am also responding on behalf of the Prime Minister to the Liaison Committee's letter dated 1st July.

The Government recognises the importance of free trade agreements (FTAs) receiving thorough scrutiny and the CRaG process provides Parliament with this opportunity. As set out in your Committee's report, the Government commitment to holding debates on FTAs during the CRaG process is subject to the request being made in a timely manner and parliamentary time being available. As I am sure you will appreciate, there have been a range of competing demands for time in the Chamber ahead of the summer recess. It was therefore not possible to find time for a debate, however, the House will have opportunities to debate the implementing legislation as it passes through the House.

The Government appreciates the valuable contribution the select committees provide to the scrutiny of FTAs. As I have previously stated, it is important that the Government shares reports under Section 42 of the Agriculture Act 2020 with the International Trade Committee in good time to enable the Committee to scrutinise FTAs and publish its report. The Government has also made a clear commitment that select committees, including your own, should have a reasonable period of time in which to produce a report prior to the formal scrutiny period under CRaG being commenced. The Committee will be aware that, following my recent exchanges with the Liaison Committee, I have written to all departments about how to conduct effective engagement with select committees. This letter is also copied to the Secretary of State for International Trade who attended the International Trade Committee on 6th July.

Nonetheless, there is a clear balance to be struck between ensuring robust scrutiny of trade agreements and ensuring we bring them into effect in a timely way, so that British businesses and consumers can reap the benefits. I note that the Committee has had sight of the Australia FTA for six months - significantly longer than the three months originally committed to - and that in this period the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee produced their report on the agreement on 17th June and the Lords International Agreement Committee produced their report on 23th June. In addition the Government shared both the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission's report on the Australia FTA and its own section 42 report with your Committee in advance of publication so that the Committee could scrutinise them. In particular, the section 42 report was shared with you nearly three weeks prior to the triggering of CRaG.

I understand that the Secretary of State for International Trade will also be writing to you shortly on this matter, including a response to your letter of 12th July. I hope that the Committee and the Secretary of State can move forwards and work together to ensure the scrutiny of this agreement can continue effectively.

This letter is copied to the Chairs of the International Agreements Committee, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, as well as the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker and the Secretary of State for International Trade.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark', is centered on the page.