



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Ranil Jayawardena MP

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Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP

Secretary of State for International Trade

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22 September 2022

Dear Secretaries of State

Australia Free Trade Agreement – Government response to the Committee's Report

Congratulations on your appointments as Secretaries of State, I look forward to working with both of you on the implications of our new trade agreements on the UK agricultural and food sector.

Thank you for the Government's response to my Committee's report on the Australia FTA. The Committee was disappointed by the quality of the Government's response. It did not properly address the substantive arguments the Committee made, and instead largely restated existing Government lines. In response to the Committee's central recommendation that the Government commit to core standards for goods entering the UK the response referenced the fact that the trade deal will not lower the standards that UK standards producers have to meet. While this is true, it does not address the central concern about food and drink made or produced to lower standards elsewhere entering the UK and disadvantaging UK businesses.

This lack of engagement and willingness to accept constructive suggestion for improvement are particularly concerning given the other FTAs that the Government is seeking to agree with countries that have much greater offensive interests in the UK's agricultural markets. The potential impact of an FTA covering agricultural goods with Brazil or the USA will be much greater than the impact of the Australia FTA and your response to this report is unlikely to reassure UK farmers and producers that you are listening to their concerns and are willing to take a different approach in future negotiations.

I am therefore writing to ask that you, as newly appointed Secretaries of State, review and update the Government's response to my Committee's report. In particular I'd be grateful if you would revisit your responses to the following recommendations.

1. That the Government commit to increasing food and drink exports by at least £278m in the Agriculture, Food and Drink Exports Council trade strategy. This would show farmers and food producers that the Government is on their side and is committed to helping them make up any loss of income from this FTA by taking advantage of the increased trading opportunities that the UK now has access to.

2. That the membership of the agri-food Trade Advisory Group (TAG) be expanded to provide it with additional expertise on animal welfare, health and environmental considerations. The response to this proposal was that "TAG membership is regularly reviewed according to the needs of the UK's trade policy" and that "the next membership review is set to take place this summer". The latest membership list, which was updated on 5 September, still does not appear to have anyone from a veterinary, animal health, or food safety background. Representatives with expertise in all of these areas should be represented on the TAG.

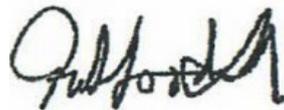
3. That the Government set out what additional resource it will provide to the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC). The Committee was concerned that the Chair of the TAC had to use resource from his university to produce the TAC's Australia FTA report, particularly given the much larger challenge they face analysing the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Given the assurance that then Minister Mordaunt gave on this

issue, we expected to be provided with more specific detail rather than just being told that "The Government will continue to consider ways to further support the Commission."

In addition to the above I would like to take this opportunity to encourage your departments to work together closely during the negotiation of future trade deals. I would therefore suggest that, for each country where DIT is in negotiation or considering negotiating new FTAs, DEFRA provides DIT with its analysis of the areas where regulatory or farming practice differ in a way that might place UK farmers at a competitive disadvantage. This should ensure that potential issues of concerns are identified early in the negotiation process rather than coming to light later in the process when they are more difficult to address.

I would be grateful for your joint response by 13 October.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Goodwill', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP
Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee