



## Department for International Trade

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Angus Brendan MacNeil MP  
Chair of the International Trade Select Committee  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA

12 December 2020

Dear Angus,

As you know, the Secretary of State has this week signed an FTA with Singapore. As the second-biggest deal the UK has signed in the Asia Pacific, the Singapore continuity agreement will provide a gateway to Asia for UK businesses, locking in the benefits of our existing trading relationship, worth £17.6bn last year.


It is the latest step in the UK's trade strategy to create a network of trade agreements with dynamic economies far beyond Europe, making the UK a hub for services and digital trade. The UK is already one of the world's biggest exporters of digital services, with more than £200bn worth of UK services delivered remotely in 2019.

The Singaporean Government is publishing in parallel a copy of the text of this FTA. We understand that timely parliamentary scrutiny is essential, and we wish to ensure that Parliament has as early sight as possible to preserve the convention that Parliament is the first to see text of any trade agreement we sign.

I am therefore enclosing a copy of the UK Singapore FTA. This will be formally laid under CRAg in coming days.

I look forward to further engagement on this agreement.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GH', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**THE RT HON GREG HANDS MP**  
Minister of State  
Department for International Trade

## Annex

### Responses to points and questions raised by the European Scrutiny Committee

Your letter describes the Protocol's continued application of the EU's 2016 Market Access Regulation ("the Regulation") in Northern Ireland after the end of the transition period. It notes that the Regulation includes provision for the EU to unilaterally impose safeguard measures on goods originating in ACP countries, and asks for an explanation of *"what would happen if the EU were to introduce unilateral safeguard measures on certain products originating in ACP countries which were not mirrored in the rest of the UK. Would Northern Ireland be required to apply the EU measures even though other parts of the UK would not have to apply equivalent domestic measures [...]?"*

Your letter also requests an explanation of *"why you consider the "at risk" criteria to be relevant in determining how safeguard measures adopted under the 2016 Regulation would apply in Northern Ireland."*

As stated in my letter on this topic of 6<sup>th</sup> May, HM Government considers it unnecessary to replicate the unilateral safeguard provision set out in Regulation (EU) 2016/1076 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2016 ("the 2016 Regulation"). Instead, HM Government is seeking to replicate the trade agreements negotiated between the EU and ACP states, including bilateral safeguard provisions in these agreements. These provisions provide similar protections to the safeguard provisions contained in the 2016 Regulation, but are reciprocal instead of unilateral so that the United Kingdom or ACP countries may apply protective measures against each other's imports if necessary.

As you are aware regarding the wider 'at risk' criteria, the Protocol provides for certain goods to be subject to EU tariff policy upon entering Northern Ireland. As covered in my and Ranil Jayawardena's previous letters of 6<sup>th</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> October respectively, the Protocol sets out that the final tariff regime in Northern Ireland – including the criteria for distinguishing 'at risk' from 'not at risk' goods – is expected to be agreed at the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee (WAJC).

Whilst I appreciate the Committee's ongoing interest on this subject, I am therefore unable to respond on specific questions of where the EU or the United Kingdom's tariff regime would apply at this stage. This includes the example given in the question of whether tariff and quota-based safeguards of the 2016 Regulation could apply in Northern Ireland, should the EU apply these measures to goods originating in ACP countries.

HM Government continues to work constructively with the EU through the WAJC process as demonstrated in its latest meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> October. Here, the Committee considered its remaining tasks for the rest of the transition period and the United Kingdom underlined its continuing commitment to working together with the EU in this forum. I look forward to being able to update the Committee on Protocol implementation in due course.

On the above point, your letter also asks *"what impact would this have on businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland?"*

HM Government remains committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland businesses and consumers will benefit from British FTAs, just as the rest of the United Kingdom will. To this end, it remains the position of HM Government that EU tariffs should not be payable on any goods remaining in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, even where goods are classified as 'at risk' of entering the EU

market, it is HM Government's intention to make full use of the provisions in the Protocol to waive and/ or reimburse higher tariffs where these have been paid.

As mentioned in my previous letter, HM Government's new Trader Support Service (TSS) will also provide end-to-end support for traders importing into Northern Ireland. This support will avoid burdening businesses with any potential complexities in the system – including any associated with the 'at risk' regime – and will be available to traders at no extra cost.

Although I cannot confirm at this stage on the interactions between the 'at risk' regime and the application of the 2016 Regulation and safeguard measure in Northern Ireland, I can confirm that work is well in train to minimise the impact on Northern Ireland business and traders as a result of the Protocol.

HM Government will also, of course, continue to update existing guidance for businesses between now and the end of the transition period.