



**Environment, Food  
and Rural Affairs  
Committee**

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
London  
*By email*

30 January 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

**SPS import checks**

During the period in which GB has been preparing to launch its Border Target Operating Model my Committee has repeatedly made the point that proportionate and effective import controls are vital to protect its biosecurity. Such controls will prevent outbreaks of pests and diseases that threaten human, animal and plant health, ensure the safety, quality and biosecurity of our food products and maintain the confidence of our trading partners. Diseases such as Foot and Mouth, African Swine Fever and Xylella Fastidiosa are amongst the most serious biosecurity risks our country faces and all steps should be taken to protect against outbreaks that could have disastrous domestic consequences.

In connection with this, and in light of recent announcements relating to changes in the controls regime at the Port of Dover, I am writing to highlight my Committee's serious concerns about:

1. Defra's plans to reduce funding for SPS spot checks at the port of Dover for products of animal origin.
2. Operation of the Border Target Operating Model including physical checks at the Sevington inland border facility.

**Spot checks for products of animal origin**

The current approach for spot checks on products of animal origin (POAO) at the Port of Dover began in September 2022 when Defra introduced [rules](#) making it illegal to bring pork and pork products over 2kg into GB, unless produced to the EU's

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commercial standards, due to the significant risk of African Swine Fever (ASF). Since then, Dover Port Heath Authority and Border Force have [said](#) that over 57 tonnes of illegal meat products have been seized, including 5.5 tonnes of illegal meat confiscated over the weekend before Christmas 2023 alone.

We now understand that Defra funding for these spot checks at the Port of Dover will shortly be reduced by around 70%. In response, the Dover Port Heath Authority said the cuts in funding “will have a catastrophic effect” on GB biosecurity and has publicly [called upon](#) Defra to abandon its plans to cut the budget for POAO spot checks.

### **Border Target Operating Model physical checks**

In addition to this, we remain concerned about the location of the physical checks that will be undertaken for commercial loads under the Border Target Operating Model.

The [Border Target Operating Model](#) (BTOM) was published by the Government on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2023. It sets out a new approach to SPS controls at the border, applicable to imports from all countries into Great Britain. The BTOM has been delayed five times since its planned introduction in 2021 and will now be introduced tomorrow (31 January 2024), with physical checks beginning at the end of April 2024. The Committee sent a [letter](#) to the previous Secretary of State on 29 September regarding the BTOM. A [response](#) was received titled ‘update to EFRA’ on 25 October.

Your Department informed us that Sevington will provide a modern and purpose-built site for goods and live animals that arrive through both the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel. Defra’s justification appears to be that it is located to support the smooth flow of goods out of both points of entry without disrupting traffic flows out of the Port of Dover.

However, the inland border facility at Sevington will require vehicles to travel 22 miles unsupervised across Kent, presenting potentially serious biosecurity risks, but also compromising compliance. We understand that drivers will be under no obligation to go to Sevington, if asked to do so. As such, we have real and reasonable concerns about the geographic dislocation of the inland border facility from the point of entry.

### **I would be grateful if you could inform my Committee of:**

1. The current amount of funding in place for spot checks of POAO at the Port of Dover and whether you have plans to change that funding. Furthermore, what assessment you have made of the potential impact of a reduction in those checks on the UK’s biosecurity.

2. How many checks are currently being undertaken for POAO at the Port of Dover, and whether you have plans to change the number of checks being undertaken or the location in which those checks are taking place.
3. Your rationale for persisting with the plans to open the Sevington inland border facility despite stakeholder concerns.
4. What safeguards will be in place to ensure the required loads travel from the point of entry (Port of Dover) to the Sevington site (22 miles away), without either offloading goods on route or not presenting at Sevington at all.
5. What engagement you have had with the Dover Port Health Authority and other stakeholders on this matter.
6. Your plans for the Bastion Point inland border facility.

Given the urgency of this matter, I kindly ask for you to provide a reply addressing the above points by close on 16 February.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP', written in a cursive style.

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