



International Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State
Department for International Trade

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport

18 December 2020

Dear Liz and Grant,

This morning we had an urgent meeting with the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) and the British Retail Consortium (BRC) to discuss the substantial disruption currently occurring at UK container ports. It appears that there are several causal factors, including Brexit stockpiling and Covid-19 disruption – indeed we understand that unloaded containers of PPE supplies, at one time as many as 11,000, are still clogging the arteries of commerce.

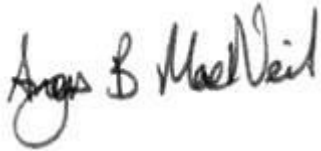
We were concerned to hear that this disruption is causing delays to goods entering the UK, and major increases to the costs of shipping freight, with container prices trebling or quadrupling to up to £8,000 in some cases. There may be solutions but the problem is so big it needs Government intervention to make sure all the moving parts are coordinating.

We were particularly surprised to hear that berthing is so rationed at Felixstowe that often not all UK containers can be unloaded during the berthing time and get taken to Zeebrugge. Perhaps somewhere there is capacity between Invergordon and Kent that could be used to alleviate Felixstowe congestion and easier onwards road transport than Zeebrugge.

There may indeed be solutions but the problem is so big we both as Committee chairs feel it needs Government intervention to make sure all the moving parts are coordinating. Both the FDF and BRC would also like the Government to intervene to ensure all relevant stakeholders are co-ordinating to minimise this disruption. This we both feel is important to ensure goods are able to enter the UK without significant delay, and to maintain the international competitiveness and reputation of the UK in respect of trade and ports, and global shipping and logistics.

We call on both you, and your colleagues in other relevant Government departments, to urgently examine the situation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Angus B MacNeil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Angus Brendan MacNeil
Chair of the International Trade Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Huw Merriman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H'.

Huw Merriman
Chair of the Transport Committee