



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP
Chair, Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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30 April 2024

By email

Dear Sir Robert,

Thank you for your letter of 25 April concerning Defra's readiness and plans for the introduction of new import controls from today, to which I am replying on the Secretary of State's behalf.

In respect of your questions:

What will a “graduated” or “light touch” approach to the 30 April measures look like in practice?

Recognising that the introduction of these essential new controls could pose challenges initially for business, our graduated approach will minimise disruption while protecting our biosecurity: which benefits everyone, especially traders.

Our approach to compliance and enforcement will be carefully calibrated to balance an expectation that businesses will do their best to comply, with an understanding that there will be a period of adjustment to the new controls and the importance of minimising disruption to the flow of goods.

Competent authorities will be encouraged to take proportionate action on non-compliances identified which do not pose a significant risk to public, human, animal, or plant health. We will continue to pursue an approach of supporting businesses towards full compliance via guidance and warnings where possible and only escalating enforcement where necessary.

What percentage of new SPS checks on imports will take place from 30 April in each risk category, and when will the measures be scaled up to their intended capacity?

Those commodities categorised as high-risk which from today see the relocation of their existing ID and physical inspections from destination to border control posts, will be checked at the percentages specified in the published Border Target Operating Model.

From today, Defra expects remote documentary checks on medium-risk animal products will be undertaken at 100%, and on medium-risk plant products from the EU at 3% typically, as specified in the published Border Target Operating Model. We will build up to full ID and physical check rates to ensure a pragmatic and phased approach to both protect biosecurity and minimise disruption. Physical and ID checks for medium-risk goods are in place from today. Checks will initially focus on those commodities that present the greatest risk, and will build up to full inspection numbers over time.

Will the volume of checks vary between points of entry?

The volume of checks will vary as the profile of the goods imported through different BCPs will vary considerably. Defra's intention is that official check controls should be undertaken at uniform rates across points of entry per the Border Target Operating Model, although we recognise that at the start of checks, while the new implementation arrangements become embedded, some border control posts may require that checks are targeted on a risk basis.

What barriers remain to implementing any or all checks on 30 April?

It was never Defra's intention that the end state for check rates would be achieved on 30 April, given the time needed for industry and competent health authorities to acclimatise to the new requirements. Defra is confident in beginning the graduated introduction of checks from today.

Defra will be carefully monitoring the rollout of the new checks and incrementally increase the range of medium-risk commodities called in for risk-based ID and physical checks, beginning with those assessed as presenting the greatest biosecurity risk.

What is the status of the Sevington inland border facility, and will it be operational from 30 April?

The border control post at Sevington has received its designation, which was communicated to stakeholders on 23 April, and has begun operation today. We have also completed testing successfully and are confident that any requirement to present their goods for checks will be communicated clearly to drivers.

What impact will any delays to the expected checks have on goods being imported from non-EU countries?

Full controls are already in place for goods from non-EU countries and their delivery will be unaffected by the phased implementation of new checks on goods from the EU. The impact on imported goods of all origins will be minimal as our actions are designed to maintain biosecurity while ensuring minimal delays. The extension of the Border Target Operating Model to non-EU goods will see some controls start to reduce from today e.g., low-risk

animal products from assessed countries will no longer require routine checks upon entry at a border control post and for medium-risk commodities the frequency of ID and physical checks may change as check rates switch to the Border Target Operating Model's commodity/country risking approach. Check rates on non-EU goods from today will be in line with the percentages specified in the published Border Target Operating Model.

A copy of the presentation that Defra presented to ports and seen by the Financial Times

The Financial Times has not shared this presentation with us. Defra has provided port health authorities and local authorities with a broad range of guidance material over a long period regarding arrangements for implementation of the new controls from today to help smooth the introduction.

A detailed breakdown of Defra's phased approach to BTOM implementation, which can be shared with ports and businesses

We have engaged extensively with port health and local authorities so that they understand the approach to how check numbers on medium-risk commodities will increase over time. Some of the detail includes confidential information for the competent health authorities that could be misused by business to evade controls if it was to be placed in the public domain. Our focus is on a degree of tolerance for administrative errors to support a move towards full compliance; we have been clear throughout that where there is a threat identified to biosecurity or public health, the goods should be detained. We have set out to port health and local authorities the tolerance for errors within the Export Health Certificate – recognising official veterinarians in the EU will need time to get everything right – and the easement that for three months will allow the acceptance of scanned copy health certificates.

I hope that this is sufficient to assuage your concerns about Defra's readiness and to provide assurance that Defra's plans for careful and proportionate implementation of the new controls today are in line with our previous announcements. Defra will provide the Committee with regular written progress updates following the new controls' introduction.

Yours sincerely,



LORD DOUGLAS-MILLER