



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon George Eustice MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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Secretary of State

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Delays to seafood and meat exports

Thank you for providing a briefing at short notice to the EFRA Committee on 27 January on the disruptions to fish and other food exports to the EU since the start of the year, and the steps Defra has been taking to address them.

This is an issue the Committee will be inquiring into urgently. However, there are some issues where it would be helpful for the Committee to receive further information on the public record in the interim.

We would therefore be grateful if you could provide answers to the following questions by 5 February:

1. When will details of the eligibility criteria and claim process for the £23 million compensation fund for fish exporters announced on 20 January be published? What is the justification for the cap of £100,000 on compensation that has already been announced, both in terms of the amount chosen and the fact that an absolute limit is being imposed rather than a proportional one?
2. Is the £23 million, or a proportion of it, being found from existing Defra budgets? If so which budgets is it being taken from, and what impacts will that have on existing programmes?
3. What estimates has Defra made of the costs, by sector, to UK seafood and meat businesses to date of:
 - a. Losses of cargo during export owing to the recent delays at the border;
 - b. Reductions in market prices paid to UK producers as a result of the added costs and delays of exporting to the EU; and
 - c. Fulfilling the additional non-tariff barriers for exporters to the EU.

4. What arrangements does Defra have in place to liaise with other UK Government agencies including HMRC to identify and deal with issues as soon as they arise? How are industry, including small businesses, able to feed into these?
5. What systems are in place to ensure the UK Government learns from the experience of UK exporters, to ensure that food imports to the UK do not face similar delays when the UK introduces SPS controls on imports from the EU later in the year?
6. When do you expect the UK's application to allow the export of seed potatoes to the EU to be accepted, and what steps are you taking to support the industry in the interim?

The Committee recognises that you have put in place arrangements to liaise with business over issues they are encountering at the border, and that Defra is actively seeking to help businesses who have loads that are delayed. However, as we discussed, there are concerns about how accessible the department is to smaller businesses, and that there is a lack of feedback from the department about how the issues that businesses are raising have been addressed.

We also discussed the scope for simplifying the bureaucratic requirements on UK companies of complying with EU rules. As you know, many in the affected sectors have called for a grace period and/or lighter-touch enforcement whilst they adapt to the new requirements on them. Given the EU has not agreed to this it will be important for both sides to move quickly to agree more streamlined and modern processes for the future reflecting our mutual interest in trade flowing smoothly. In the meantime, UK business will rightly expect that when the UK applies SPS controls that they are enforced as diligently to EU exports to the UK as the EU applies them to UK imports.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Neil', followed by a large, stylized flourish.

Neil Parish
Chair of the Committee