



Department for
International Trade



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The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith QC
Chairman
International Agreements Committee
House of Lords
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29 January 2021

Dear Peter,

Update on plans for CPTPP accession

I am writing to update you and your committee regarding our plans to notify the CPTPP members of our application to begin the accession process; our public 'Notification of Intent'.

Joining CPTPP is an important part of the plan to grow our economy post-Brexit, by lowering trade barriers for exporters of British goods, deepening access for our services and bolstering industries that support hundreds of thousands of jobs in all parts of the UK as we recover from coronavirus. It is part of a big strategic move that aims to deepen the UK's access to fast-growing markets and major economies of the future, including Mexico, Malaysia and Vietnam, for the benefit of UK business.

As well as securing increased trade and investment opportunities for the UK as a newly independent trading nation, accession would also help us diversify our trading links and supply chains by placing the UK in the centre of a modern, progressive network of free trade agreements with dynamic economies, increasing our economic security at a time of heightened uncertainty and disruption in the world.

Accession will also help us develop broader and deeper engagement in the Indo Pacific and the Americas by securing our future place in the world as a leader in a network of countries committed to free trade. It would send a powerful signal to the rest of the world that as an independent trading nation the UK will champion free trade, fight protectionism and remove barriers to trade at every opportunity.

We have made excellent progress preparing for accession to CPTPP, having already signed or are negotiating trade agreements with Japan, Canada, Singapore, Vietnam, Chile, Peru, and Mexico, which provide a springboard to our CPTPP accession.

Since July 2018, we have engaged with all 11 member countries at both ministerial and official level to discuss UK accession to CPTPP. All CPTPP members have welcomed the UK's interest in accession. During the Secretary of State's visit to Japan to sign the UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, Japan underlined their commitment to support the UK's accession. We want to build on this momentum and look forward to working with Japan as chair of the CPTPP commission in 2021, alongside the wider membership.

Since the publication of our Interim Update on CPTPP in June 2020, we have been working closely with CPTPP member countries to understand the detail of what a UK application to the agreement looks like. We are the first country to do this and, as such, our understanding of the process has evolved throughout these discussions (as is the CPTPP membership's understanding).

Based on these discussions, the stated CPTPP accession process, and the UK's own internal processes, we have tailored the application process for the UK and devised a two-stage approach:

- Notifying CPTPP members of our request to begin the accession process which triggers the CPTPP membership to consider our interest formally but does not commit the UK to anything.
- The launch of formal negotiations (and the start of the application in earnest) which would be subject to CPTPP members agreeing to establish an accession working group; and the cabinet agreeing the UK's negotiating mandate. We will work closely with Japan, the CPTPP Chair, to ensure the timing of the launch of formal negotiations aligns with our domestic procedures.

I am writing to inform you that the Government plans to proceed with the first step, to notify CPTPP members of our request to begin the accession process, our public 'Notification of Intent'. After formally informing CPTPP members of our intention to begin negotiations, the date to begin negotiations will be subject to us confirming collective agreement on a negotiating mandate as well as our accompanying public Outline Approach, Scoping Assessment, and formal response to the consultation on potential CPTPP accession for public and parliamentary scrutiny.

We will not begin negotiations without publishing this public documentation for public and parliamentary scrutiny, in accordance with the 7 December Written Ministerial Statement, which reaffirmed DIT's commitment to transparency and ensuring that parliamentarians, UK citizens and businesses have access to information on our trade negotiations.

Best wishes,



Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, Kt

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