



**Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Committee**

Tuesday, 17 March 2026

Anthony Baldock
Corporate Director Health and Wellbeing
Ashford Port Health Authority
By email

Subject: Non-attendance of commercial consignments at Sevington BCP

Dear Anthony

I am writing regarding your statement of 5 March relating to the Committee's publication of data on the non-attendance rates of commercial consignments at Sevington Border Control Post (BCP).

Gathering and publication of data

In the Committee's report, [UK-EU trade: towards a resilient border strategy](#), we requested that Defra share with us the August and November 2024 figures for (a) the number of lorries directed to the Sevington Inland BCP for checks, and (b) the number that presented for inspection. We requested this data given our concerns around the 22 unescorted miles that selected hauliers would need to travel between Dover port and Sevington BCP. This clearly presents an opportunity for rogue operators to either unload contraband ahead of checks or simply not present for checks at all; our request for data relates primarily to the latter, though the risks of either are highly significant given the prevalence of potentially devastating animal and plant diseases in Europe.

We requested data from non-consecutive months to allow meaningful scrutiny of compliance without compromising the dynamic nature of intelligence led biosecurity controls. The [Government committed](#) to providing this information to us by the end of January 2026, but Defra subsequently informed us that it did not hold the data and would seek it from Ashford Port Health Authority.

The Department sought assurances that we would not publish any raw data provided – taken to mean specific details of the contents or codes of individual consignments, vehicles or companies – which could provide actionable intelligence to would-be smugglers. We gave these assurances on raw data but made it clear that we could publish an analysis of that data if we felt it necessary. This was in line with the

accepted report recommendation, our primary role in scrutinising the work of Defra and its associated bodies, and the clear public interest in ensuring proper biosecurity measures at the border.

In the event, we were not provided with any of the raw data provided by Ashford Port Health Authority to Defra, but instead a summary analysis of the rates of non-attendance that had been produced by Defra, covering several dates and accompanied by explanatory notes and wider policy commentary. Given our inability to conduct independent analysis, and with the knowledge and agreement of Defra, we published the document exactly as we received it. To be clear, we made no editorial decision to publish 'a portion of the facts' but published exactly what was received in the form it was received.

Request for further information

The clarification above, however, is an unnecessary distraction from the matter at hand; that of the clear risks to biosecurity posed by non-attendance at Sevington BCP. During [our recent oral evidence session](#) with the Permanent Secretary (3 March), we sought further clarification on follow-up action regarding consignments that "drive-by" Sevington. While we have been assured by the Department and again indirectly in your statement that such cases are pursued by multiple agencies, no supporting data or evidence has yet been provided to demonstrate the extent to which this occurs or the success of those interventions.

In the session we asked Emma Bourne, Director General for EU Reset and Trade, whether data exists on outcomes following non-attendance at Sevington BCP and whether she would support the Committee's continued scrutiny of biosecurity outcomes. She confirmed that Defra does not currently hold that information but that securing both that data and information on where products were going after not attending Sevington for checks was within "the spirit of the work that we are trying to do".

As such, and to avoid further issues around the transmission or publication of data, could you please set out the provide the following information directly to the Committee no later than 2 April:

1. The detailed operational process for following up on consignments that do not attend Sevington BCP within three hours of being directed to do so, including:
 - the organisations involved;
 - how responsibilities are coordinated across those bodies; and
 - the practical steps taken from initial non-attendance through to resolution.

2. Any data you hold on follow-up activity, including the number of successful follow-up interventions and the outcomes of those cases such as the disposal of unchecked consignments, enforcement actions taken, or any penalties or proceedings initiated.
3. Your assessment of the operational implications of the proposed UK–EU SPS agreement, including:
 - the expected impact of any relaxation of controls on EU trade for Sevington BCP's workload and processes, and
 - the financial consequences for both the BCP and Ashford Borough Council.

Whilst the Committee is committed to proper and transparent scrutiny in all aspects of our work, we continue to appreciate that some of aspects your responses may require confidentiality. The Committee secretariat is therefore ready to discuss any specific elements of your response that may require confidentiality to avoid usable information falling into the hands of the individuals and businesses we are both seeking to counter.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Mr Alistair Carmichael MP
Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

cc: Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Minister for Biosecurity, Borders and Animals
Emma Bourne, Director General for EU Reset and Trade, Defra