

Title EU reset – SPS goods moving through the short straits

Subject UK Biosecurity at the border - EFRA Committee report and recommendations. Britain's illegal meat crisis and UK-EU trade: towards a resilient border strategy - the UK Border Target Operating Model (BTOM)

Date: 10th August 2026

From Heather Jones, secretariat of the FLG

Ref DEFRA response to the recommendations from the HC1296 Third Report of Session 2024–25 and HC 1297 Fourth Report of Session 2024–25

To Rt Hon Mr Alistair Carmichael MP, Chair of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA)

Dear Mr Carmichael,

Follow-up to the Committee's reports (HC1296 and HC1297) on:

Biosecurity at the Border: Britain's Illegal Meat Crisis and UK–EU Trade: Towards a Resilient Border Strategy

We hope that you and the Committee have had an enjoyable summer recess.

The Freight Liaison Group (FLG) is writing to provide an update following our previous correspondence and to seek the Committee's assistance in ensuring that the recommendations arising from both inquiries are translated into practical action.

Since our last submission, FLG has continued to engage constructively with DEFRA in support of the Government's stated ambition to develop a resilient and effective border operating model.

On 16 February 2026 we wrote to both the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary. Whilst we received no response from the Secretary of State, the Permanent Secretary's office facilitated engagement with officials responsible for DEFRA's Border Readiness and EU Reset programme.

Between March and June 2026, FLG has participated in a programme of 1-2-1 engagement with DEFRA officials, including meetings in March, April, May and June, and as part of DEFRA's wider stakeholder calls. Our reason for writing again is two-fold:

1. While we welcomed these opportunities and appreciated the willingness of officials to meet with industry, it is notable that as different DEFRA officials attended, there seldom seems to be any collaboration internally or within other departments where the short straits border under a new SPS deal will be affected. During this period there has also

been considerable turnover within the senior leadership responsible for these programmes, including changes at Deputy Director, Director and Director General level. Whilst we recognise that organisational change is inevitable, it is impacting on delivery, as there is a continual lack of understanding and acceptance of the challenges and complexities at the short straits. This is, in our view, without question delaying progress on matters of considerable importance to traders, ports, logistics operators, intermediaries and on biosecurity matters.

2. There has been very little substantive information shared regarding:
 - the future operating model for the Short Straits and / or a replacement for the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM);
 - the long-term future of Sevington Border Control Post (acknowledging the HMRC announcement on 5th August about their withdrawal from Sevington Inland Border Facility (IBF) in early 2027); [Update on the future use of Sevington Inland Border Facility](#)
 - the practical implementation of the proposed SPS arrangements with the European Union, particular for rest of world imports;
 - the operational measures that will strengthen biosecurity and tackle illegal imports of products of animal origin.

It is not therefore a lack of engagement that we are writing to you again, but the value of it, as a continuing absence of detailed policy development, operational planning and meaningful stated “co-design” with the freight and logistics sector. There has not been any “co-design” with industry, and this appears inconsistent with DEFRA’s stated commitment from the very outset, to work collaboratively with industry in designing future border arrangements.

Meanwhile, the operational reality at the Short Straits remains a significant concern. In our view, the current arrangements continue to leave unacceptable gaps in compliance. The current system remains fundamentally flawed with vehicles routinely not attending the inland BCP. This will be made worse by the latest HMRC announcement that all customs clearance at UK government funded inland facilities ends in early 2027.

On the proposed post EU SPS agreement, there is no effective system in place nor one planned that we are aware of, that will be able to confirm that vehicles carrying Products of Animal Origin (POAO) or High-Risk Food Not of Animal Origin (HRFNAO) have been checked and cleared in the EU, before crossing our border. This is stated to be the UK government’s current working assumption. This undermines both biosecurity objectives and confidence in the integrity of the UK’s border controls.

One of the Committee’s recommendations was that:

“A taskforce for illegal imports of animal products should be established... to provide oversight of the strategy’s design and implementation and to drive improvements... The taskforce must have credibility with all stakeholder groups and should spend time with operational teams.”
FLG strongly supported that recommendation.

Unfortunately, our experience over recent months does not suggest that such an approach has yet materialised – it feels, in fact, regressive. Our engagement has largely comprised discussion of future policy aspirations and the timing of the UK-EU Summit, rather than meaningful collaboration on the practical operational challenges facing the Short Straits.

We therefore respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether sufficient progress has been made in implementing its recommendations.

We would welcome the Committee’s support in encouraging DEFRA to establish the proposed taskforce without further delay and to ensure that experienced industry representatives are involved from the outset. FLG believes it can make a valuable contribution by bringing together expertise from ports, carriers, logistics providers, customs intermediaries and border practitioners with direct operational experience.

Should it assist the Committee, we would be pleased to provide further evidence or meet with members to discuss these issues in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,

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