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Angus Brendan MacNeil MP
International Trade Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Angus,

SCRUTINISING A FUTURE UK-AUSTRALIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)

Thank you for your letter of 27 April, regarding the role of your Committee in scrutinising a future UK-Australia free trade agreement (FTA).

My latest talks with Minister Tehan, my Australian, counterpart were positive and have moved us closer to a gold-standard FTA with Australia, particularly in the areas of services, mobility, and innovation. We have now entered a negotiation sprint to agree the remaining details of the deal with the aim of reaching agreement in principle (AIP) by June.

As you know from our previous discussions, I am committed to ensuring transparency and enabling effective scrutiny of the Government's ambitious trade agenda. I'm delighted by the positive working relationship that we have built between your Committee and DIT.

You asked some specific questions in relation to what will happen after reaching AIP in June. It is too early to specify the exact length of time between AIP and the text of the agreement being signed and subsequently published for scrutiny by your Committee and others.. Once AIP has been secured and after all chapters of the agreement have been closed, the text of the agreement will undergo an extensive process over several months to prepare it for signature and subsequent publication. This includes the process of legal scrub, preparing the independently scrutinised impact assessment and other briefing documents.

We hope this process will last six months. However, each negotiation with a partner country is unique and it is not reasonable to apply a one-size-fits-all process to the presenting of our FTAs to Parliament.

I will of course keep your Committee and other relevant authorities informed of each relevant negotiation. I will also update the House when we reach AIP in June which will include next steps in relation to the scrutiny of the Australia agreement. As part of this we will continue to work with your Committee to support its reporting on the final agreement.

The Government has been clear that a deal with Australia must work for UK consumers, producers and companies. Any deal we sign with Australia will include protections for the agriculture industry and will not undercut UK farmers or compromise our high standards. Typically, any tariff liberalisation is staged over a decade or more, with safeguards built in. Australian meat accounts for a very low proportion of total UK imports, and is produced to high standards. Furthermore, a deal with Australia is an important stepping stone to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and membership to this free trade area will allow UK farmers even greater access to the growing consumer markets in Asia.

If your Committee would find it helpful then I would be pleased to make available my Chief Negotiator and relevant senior civil servants for a private session in June before AIP as a means to update you on our progress, under the proviso that negotiations will remain live and the agreement would not yet be finalised.

I am copying this letter to the International Agreements Committee.

Best wishes,



THE RT HON ELIZABETH TRUSS MP
Secretary of State for International Trade
& President of the Board of Trade