



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Committee Office, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6194/5528 Email efracom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk

From the Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon Liz Truss MP
Secretary of State for International Trade
King Charles Street
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AH

26 May 2021

Secretary of State

Prospective UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement

I am writing in the context of the press reports about the prospective free trade agreement (FTA) with Australia. As you know the EFRA Committee continues to take a close interest in how the UK's trade policy will impact on our domestic agriculture and food businesses, as well as the UK's ambition to be a global leader on the environment and animal welfare. Some of the reports about the concessions the Government has agreed to offer to Australia to achieve an FTA are therefore of serious concern. You are well aware of the widespread concerns that have been raised from across the country about the potential impacts on British farmers.

We will, of course, reserve judgement until we have had an opportunity to scrutinise the actual agreement rather than press reports. I am aware that the final text of any agreement may not be available for several months, assuming an agreement in principle is reached in June. However, given the partial reports about what the FTA may contain that are now in the public domain, and the widespread anxiety that has caused, it is vital that any agreement in principle is published so Parliamentary scrutiny of its potential implications can begin without delay.

As I set out in my letter of 29 April, to which I await a reply, the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) will have an important statutory role in supporting Parliament in scrutinising new FTAs. The original Commission's report published in March set out a series of recommendations as to how the Government could balance the drive to liberalise international trade in agri-food with upholding our high domestic production standards. The TAC rightly made clear that the Government's approach to FTAs should be part of a wider agri-food trade policy. It is therefore disappointing that the Government has yet to even indicate when it will respond to the TAC's report while still moving ahead to agree new FTAs. I would therefore be grateful if you could confirm when you intend to publish your response to the TAC's report.

The identity of the TAC's Chair and membership, as well as how well it is resourced, will be vital in ensuring that it is credible. The Committee is particularly concerned that the TAC is not currently constituted given the FTA with Australia appears to be accelerating to completion. We urge the Government to constitute and convene the new Statutory TAC as soon as possible in order for it to inform the Australian and other current FTA

negotiations, in parallel to the parliamentary scrutiny that was promised and that the EFRA Committee has consistently called for.

The Committee would therefore welcome confirmation on when we can expect an announcement on the future membership of the TAC and how it will be supported. I expect that the EFRA Committee will want to meet the new Chair at an early opportunity.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Chair of the International Trade Committee.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, consisting of the name 'Neil' followed by a stylized, elongated flourish.

Neil Parish
Chair of the Committee