



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon Liz Truss MP
Secretary of State for International Trade
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29 April 2021

Secretary of State

Trade and Agriculture Commission

The EFRA Committee, joined by colleagues from the International Trade Committee, had an informative evidence session with Tim Smith, Nick Von Westenholtz and Nigel Gibbens on 27 April on the report of the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC).

The session occurred against the backdrop of press reports that the UK is in a “sprint” to agree a free trade agreement (FTA) with Australia by the time of the G7 summit in June. This raises questions about the extent to which the Government is taking into account the TAC’s recommendations in its approach to that, and other negotiations, in the absence of a Government response to the TAC’s report. We will of course reserve judgement on any FTA with Australia until we have seen it, but I would be grateful if you could confirm when the Government intends to respond to the TAC’s report. I would hope that it will be as soon as possible, and well in advance of any FTA with significant agri-food implications being agreed so we have the opportunity to scrutinise the Government’s proposed approach.

The TAC will, of course, have an important statutory role in supporting Parliament in scrutinising new FTAs. The identity of its Chair and membership, as well as how well it is resourced, will be vital in ensuring it is credible. Again, I would welcome clarity 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.

The evidence session also highlighted the fact that the UK’s agri-food trade strategy needs to go much wider than the contents of free trade agreements. As you know, I and the Committee, have been interested for many years in how the UK will scale up its efforts to promote its excellent food and drink abroad. The TAC’s report and the evidence we heard on the 27th makes clear that we have much more to do to match, let alone surpass, our competitors. This is an area I am sure that the Committee will want to return to in the future.

The question of co-operation between the four nations of the UK was also raised. As the TAC makes clear any agri-food trade strategy must align trade policy with domestic policy on a range of issues, many of which are devolved. It must also take into account the fact that food and drink production is not equally distributed across the country and that many of our world leading export products come from the devolved nations. We would therefore be interested to understand how the Government intends to build genuine co-operation on these issues between the four nations of the UK. Much of this work will of course be led by Defra, but as the TAC makes clear there needs to be a whole of Government approach to it.

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

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