



International Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State for International Trade
Department for International Trade
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11 February 2022

Dear Anne-Marie,

I am writing further to the recent letter from Baroness Hayter, Chair of the International Agreements Committee (IAC),¹ regarding the Government's response² to the IAC's *Working Practices* report,³ and your reply⁴ to my letter⁵ supporting it.

I was very disappointed to see that the Government rejected the IAC's recommendations – particularly around codifying existing ad hoc commitments around free trade agreement (FTA) scrutiny – and my committee's additional recommendations. I strongly reject the Government's view that "now is not the right time" to do this,⁶ and urge you to reconsider.

While we are in the middle of scrutinising the UK-Australia FTA is exactly the right time to look at what could be done better or more clearly for future FTAs – learning as we go through this process and that for the expected UK-New Zealand FTA. Additionally, given the Government appears to be resiling from commitments it has made to our committees and Parliament, a clear and full single list of assurances would provide much-needed assurance around the process and the Government's commitment to good scrutiny.

I understand that the Government is concerned about permanently tying itself to fixed commitments but decreasing transparency and scrutiny cannot be appropriate and would not be acceptable.

I am confident there is, at least, a series of minimum expectations which could be agreed, even if only for a fixed time period or number of FTAs, to then be reviewed again by Government with our committees. For example, the Government has

¹ [Letter to FCDO on Working Practices, dated 8 February 2022](#)

² [Government Response to the International Agreements Committee Working Practices Report, 8 February 2022](#)

³ House of Lords, Report of the International Agreements Committee, Session 2021–22, [HL Paper 75](#)

⁴ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State regarding the IAC Working Practices report, dated 27 January 2022](#)

⁵ [Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State supporting recommendations and conclusions from the House of Lords International Agreements Committee \(IAC\) seventh report, dated 28 September 2021](#)

⁶ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State regarding the IAC Working Practices report, dated 27 January 2022](#)

committed that the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) will have “at least 3 months” to prepare advice on an FTA following a request from you.⁷ Clearly it would not be reasonable for our committees to have less time, regardless of the FTA, so this could form a firm minimum commitment. In fact, that could go further and follow your (now significantly overdue) response to my letter seeking further detail of the timeline from receiving the TAC’s advice to triggering the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act’s (CRaG) 21 sitting-day scrutiny period.⁸

My committee supports the IAC’s reply to the Government response, including the suggestion that exchanging letters would be a reasonable compromise to confirm scrutiny commitments. Following a response from you on this matter, I would be content for my committee’s staff to join the discussion of details.

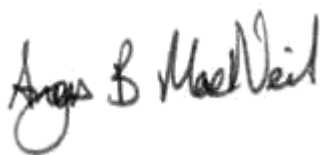
However, if the Government intends to retain its – in my view – untenable position of refusing to more firmly set down its commitments in the medium or long term, claiming that “formalising current arrangements at this time would prevent the Government and Parliament from flexibly adapting to implement lessons learned”,⁹ I would appreciate an answer to the following questions: if not now, when; and how?

This is not something that can be put off indefinitely – particularly when the Government has a full agenda of FTAs it is seeking to negotiate or renegotiate. It is essential that there is a clear process to review lessons learnt and determine future direction, in which Parliament’s views are taken into account in an appropriate and timely fashion.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Hayter and the Chairs of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, as well as the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

In accordance with our usual practice, this letter, along with any replies, will be published on the Committee’s webpage.

Kind regards,



Angus Brendan MacNeil
Chair of the International Trade Committee

⁷ Department for International Trade, [Trade and Agriculture Commission: terms of reference](#) (December 2021), p2

⁸ [Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State relating to parliamentary scrutiny of the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement, dated 21 January 2022](#)

⁹ [Government Response to the International Agreements Committee Working Practices Report, 8 February 2022](#)