



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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28 February 2022

Dear Anne-Marie,

Thank you for your letter, received today, on the publication of the UK-New Zealand free trade agreement.

I was deeply disappointed to receive the letter – notifying me of the Government's intention to sign the agreement today as part of its commitment to confidentially share relevant documents with the Committee – after it had been signed and announced,¹ and the agreement published on the internet.² This also goes against the assurances you made to me in your letter last December, in which you reiterated your commitment to ensuring my Committee receive embargoed copies of FTA documents in advance of publication.³

We have also previously discussed the issue of your Department pre-briefing the press of announcements before informing my Committee about them. Again, in your letter of 20 December you said that you were “clear” that my Committee “should have access to documents before the press” and that your officials would “prioritise timely engagement” with my Committee when announcements were being made.⁴ I was particularly disappointed, therefore, to see press reports saying that this agreement had been signed at lunchtime today, before we had received any official notification from you.⁵

We were originally told that an embargoed copy of the FTA would be sent to my Committee by Thursday last week. When this was followed up today, they were told that changes to your accompanying letter were still being made and that the documents would be with us shortly. We then discovered that the FTA had been published and the press notice released before they were sent.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-new-zealand-sign-comprehensive-trade-deal>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-new-zealand-free-trade-agreement>

³ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State regarding information sharing with International Trade Committee, dated 20 December 2021](#)

⁴ [Correspondence from the Secretary of State regarding information sharing with International Trade Committee, dated 20 December 2021](#)

⁵ For example <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-trade-deal-new-zealand-uk-b2024793.html> and <https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/k-form-welcomes-uk-new-zealand-free-trade-agreement-805943146.html>

While I understand the need to ensure that new announcements such as these are presented in the right way and that this can take time, it is unacceptable that these internal processes seem to have undermined your stated commitment that my Committee should have access to FTA documents before the press.

In another recent exchange of letters,⁶ we have also discussed the timeliness and quality of the information that your Department shares with my Committee in regard to FTAs. I note that, in the letter you sent today, you have reiterated your broad commitments to giving my Committee three months to scrutinise the agreement ahead of CRaG, and to appearing in front of the Committee to give evidence about the agreement. However, until you provide clearer information on how far in advance of triggering CRaG you intend to publish the Trade and Agriculture Commission's advice and your Section 42 report, we cannot make the necessary arrangements.

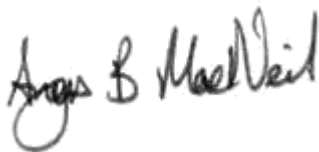
My Committee recognises that getting new FTAs to signature is a significant achievement for the Government and have been keen to work with you to ensure that the scrutiny process works for both parties. However, given the issues that we have experienced around the publication of the agreements and the insufficient information we have received about the Government's approach to scrutiny, I am concerned that your Department's failure to live up to its commitments represent a severe discourtesy to my Committee and to Parliament.

Following this letter, I would like your assurance that you will ensure your Department fulfils your commitments to Parliament's scrutiny of FTAs. I would also like to request a private meeting so that we can discuss these issues further and agree how we can work together to avoid their repetition in the future.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Hayter, Chair of the International Agreements Committee, William Wragg, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Neil Parish, Chair of the Environmental and Rural Affairs Committee, and Lorand Bartels, Chair of the Trade and Agriculture Commission.

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

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Angus B MacNeil". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Angus Brendan MacNeil
Chair of the International Trade Committee

⁶ Most recently, [letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State relating to parliamentary scrutiny of the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement, dated 21 January 2022](#)