



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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31 March 2022

Dear Anne-Marie,

Thank you for your letter of 30 March, in reply to my letter of 23 March.¹

My Committee rejects your suggestions that the Government is acting in a way that shows openness to scrutiny. Rather than engage in a further protracted exchange on these areas at this time (we will return to them in due course), I want to focus on the immediate issues around specific timings for the scrutiny of the Australia free trade agreement (FTA).

However, before I do this, there is one point in your letter that it is necessary to address directly: I did not say that Parliament has not been given more time to scrutinise FTAs since the UK-Japan agreement, and to suggest I did is to misrepresent my letter. Despite the warm words you have given us in public, and some changes in the process for scrutiny, it is the approach of your department that I was referring to, which has largely been to resist requests for more details or better scrutiny at any time or in any way other than that which you or it offers. This top-down, autocratic approach does not suggest respect for Parliament's role in scrutiny, nor for this Committee and others involved in it.

On the substance of my letter, I was displeased not to receive a response to the specific questions – particularly since my Committee has been seeking this information for some time.² While I understand some uncertainty over exactly how long it will take to produce the section 42 report following advice from the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC), I do not believe it's impossible to make a reasonable estimate of the longest likely time, and to then set this as the milestone for this FTA at least. Nor do I believe that there is any good reason why you cannot commit to sharing the TAC advice with my Committee in confidence a specific number of days after receiving it, and similarly for the section 42 report after it has been produced, prior to publication a specific number of days later.

I was also shocked that you appear to actively suggest my Committee should not be waiting to consider the TAC's advice and your section 42 report as part of our inquiry, prior to producing our report on the UK-Australia FTA. This is an astounding assertion, which cuts across the rights of Select Committees to determine their own business and what they consider in scrutinising the work of Government. The Committee is clear that its scrutiny cannot meaningfully conclude until the TAC's advice and the section 42 report have been published and considered – and we are still none the wiser as to when that will be.

¹ [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State regarding FTA scrutiny, dated 23 March 2022](#)

² [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State regarding the timeline for scrutiny, dated 16 December 2021](#)

In the absence of that information, the Committee continues to be forced to work with worst-case scenarios regarding how little time we will be allowed to fulfil crucial parts of our scrutiny of the UK-Australia FTA. I am particularly concerned that we still have no certainty regarding when we will be able to question the TAC Chair and stakeholders about agri-food provisions (notwithstanding your view on this), or you on the FTA overall.

Consequently, I am now asking that you make yourself available to give evidence on the UK-Australia FTA to my Committee from 10am to midday on Thursday 28 April. I understand that the further detail we continue to seek from you may mean this date needs to change, but until the Committee has that information it is necessary for us to be certain we will have time to discuss the FTA with you if it doesn't. We cannot wait any longer.

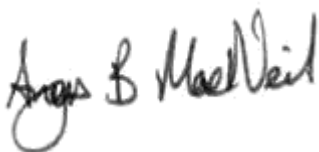
Given your previous assurances about making yourself available for scrutiny, I trust you will make it your top priority to attend. Unless you are able to confirm within the next week what the remaining scrutiny timeline will be – with answers to my previous questions,³ including whether you will meet our prior request for the CRaG period to be triggered at least 15 sitting days after publishing the TAC's advice and the section 42 report⁴ – we expect to see you on Thursday 28 April at 10am. If, by that point, you have still not been able to confirm timelines, or publish the TAC advice and section 42 report, we will question you on the rest of the agreement and schedule a further session when those documents have been made public and we have taken evidence on them.

I note that my request for similar timing information in relation to the New Zealand FTA also remains open, for response by Wednesday 13 April.

As with my previous letter, I am copying this letter to the Chairs of the International Agreements Committee, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I am additionally copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House, and the Chair of the Liaison Committee.

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

³ [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State regarding FTA scrutiny, dated 23 March 2022](#)

⁴ [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State relating to parliamentary scrutiny of the UK-Australia FTA, dated 21 January 2022](#)