



Department for
International Trade

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04 APR 2019

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Our Ref: MCB2019/01224

29th March 2019

Dear Jo,

Thank you for your email of 11th March 2019 to The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade, referring to correspondence from a number of your constituents on concerns regarding future trade agreements. I have been asked to respond as the Minister responsible for Trade Policy. Your constituents have raised three specific areas of concern regarding the debate, parliamentary scrutiny and the scope of the new FTAs which I will address below.

Firstly, your constituent highlights that modern trade deals can impact on a wide range of topics and in particular, standards. I would also like to reassure your constituents that any future deal must work for UK farmers, businesses, and consumers, and uphold food safety standards, and environmental protection. When it comes to products imported to the UK – quality, safety and performance will continue to be paramount. The global demand for British products is based on our high standards – people buy British not because it is cheaper, but because of its high quality – and to disregard food standards would be to undermine the future of British exporters. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for International Trade have already committed that we will not lower our standards in pursuit of trade agreements.

Indeed, we are committed to upholding and strengthening our high standards in food, public health and safety, product performance, and protecting the environment.

For example, human health and the environment is currently protected by a large body of existing EU environmental law covering areas including air quality, waste and resources, water, wildlife and habitats, chemical and pesticides. The EU Withdrawal Act 2018 will ensure all existing EU environmental law continues to operate in UK law, providing businesses and stakeholders with certainty as we leave the EU.

Secondly, your constituents raised concerns over parliamentary scrutiny of future Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). We're absolutely committed to ensuring that our trade policy is transparent and subject to effective parliamentary scrutiny. On 28th February, the Secretary of State for International Trade laid before Parliament a paper which sets out proposals on public transparency for future FTAs and the role of Parliament and the devolved administrations. This included confirmation that at the start of negotiations, the Government will publish its Outline Approach which will include our negotiating objectives and be accompanied by a scoping assessment which will be informed by economic modelling and set out the potential economic impacts of any agreement. We will ensure that Parliament has a role in scrutinising these documents so that we can take its views into account before commencing negotiations. The Government plans to draw on the expertise of Parliament throughout negotiations via a close relationship with a specific parliamentary committee, or one in each House. This could include the committee(s) having access to sensitive information that is not suitable for wider publication. This would ensure that the committee(s) was able to follow negotiations closely, provide views throughout the process and take a comprehensive and informed position on the final agreement.

The Government has committed to ensuring that there is sufficient time between finalising a new FTA and laying it before Parliament under ratification procedures for the committee(s) to produce a detailed report on the agreement that had been reached. Our paper on "Processes for making free trade agreements after the United Kingdom has left the European Union" can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2SLivrd>.

We are confident these proposals will help ensure that we are able to secure the support of Parliament for our future FTAs and deliver a transparent and independent trade policy that works for the whole of the UK.

The Government also launched four online public consultations on 20th July 2018, providing the public with an opportunity to give their views on potential future trade agreement negotiations with the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and on the UK Government potentially seeking accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). All four consultations were open for 14 weeks (which is two weeks longer than the EU's trade agreement consultations) and closed on 26th October 2018. The four consultations were high profile and collectively attracted over 600,000 responses in total – making this by volume one of the largest consultation exercises run by the UK government. We are now analysing the consultation responses, ensuring that due consideration is given to every response so that they effectively inform our overall approach to potential negotiations with partner countries. We plan to publish a government response, one per each of the four consultations, before entering into any formal free trade agreement negotiations.

Finally, I note your constituent's comments regarding investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). The Government is currently reviewing our trade and investment policy and are considering a wide range of options in the design of future bilateral trade and investment agreements. Until EU exit, we remain subject to EU trade & investment agreements and policy.

I hope this information is helpful in replying to your constituents.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George", with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

GEORGE HOLLINGBERY MP
Minister of State for Trade Policy
Department for International Trade