



Department for International Trade

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Our ref: MCB2020/03425

7th August 2020

Dear Ms Turner and Mr Knowles,

Thank you for your letter of the 10th July to the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade, regarding UK trade negotiations in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. I am replying as this matter falls within my portfolio.

The UK has prioritised negotiating an FTA with the US, our largest single trading partner, as an FTA with the US can be a key driver in levelling up the UK. Government analysis shows an ambitious trade agreement could positively impact every part of the UK, with the economic benefits greatest for Scotland, the Midlands, the North East, and Wales. There are gains to be had for almost every industry, from agriculture to business services.

The launch of the UK-US FTA was appreciated by a number of organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses, Tech UK, and the Scottish Seafood Association who have provided public support as we approach the unprecedented economic challenge posed by coronavirus.

At a time of growing protectionism, FTAs provide both economic security at home and opportunities abroad. They help improve the resilience of our supply chains through diversity and opening new markets for business, bringing investment, better jobs, higher wages, and lower prices, at a time when we need them most.

Logistically, the UK negotiating team is the same one that was prepared to begin discussions in March. No additional staff have been procured to negotiate, and no frontline Covid-facing staff have been moved into the negotiating team.

Regarding transparency, the Government is committed to keeping the public, Parliament, and interested stakeholders updated throughout the negotiating process. Our negotiating objectives have been informed by one of the largest public consultations ever undertaken and we continue to work with Parliament and stakeholders.

The UK Negotiating Team continues to consult the Expert Trade Advisory Groups, the Strategic Trade Advisory Group, and many other stakeholders. These groups include representation from all major industries, as well as civil society representatives, consumer groups, and business representative organisations. DIT also utilises numerous other mechanisms for consulting stakeholders and informing policy development including: 'town hall' style briefings, roundtables, webinars, bilateral and group engagements.

The Government is also committed to parliamentary transparency. The Secretary of State for International Trade updated the International Trade Committee on the 24th June and has subsequently provided a further private update. The Secretary of State will continue to work with the committee throughout negotiations, and on the 23rd July, appeared before the International Agreements Committee.

Following both negotiating rounds to date, we have laid Written Ministerial Statements (on the 18th May and the 30th June), updating Parliament on the progress of negotiations. We will continue to update Parliament and the public at the end of each negotiating round as talks progress. The Department for International Trade (DIT) has also led a comprehensive programme of engagement on the UK's trade policy with the devolved administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, building close relationships with colleagues in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Due to the economic sensitivity of trade negotiations, there will nevertheless be limitations on what information can be shared publicly while negotiations are underway.

Regarding the broader concerns raised in your letter, the Government has been clear that it will stand firm in trade negotiations. We will always do right by our farmers and aim to secure new opportunities for the industry. Our manifesto is clear that in all of our trade negotiations, we will maintain our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

The 2018 Withdrawal Act will transfer all existing food safety provisions, including existing import requirements, onto the UK statute book. This includes a ban on using artificial growth hormones in domestic and imported products, and a ban on using anything other than potable water to decontaminate poultry carcasses.

The Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland will continue to ensure that all food imports comply with the UK's high safety standards and that consumers are protected from unsafe food which does not meet our high standards. Decisions on these standards are a matter for the UK and will be made separately from any trade agreements. Any changes to existing food safety legislation would require new legislation to be brought before this Parliament.

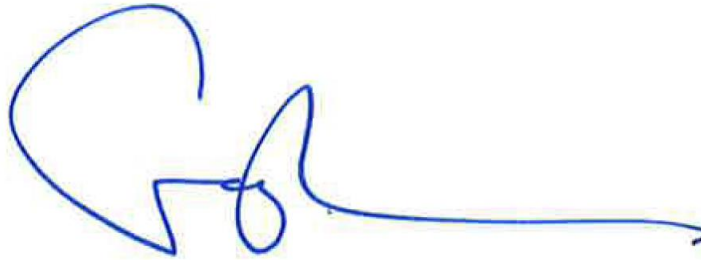
Ultimately, all parts of the UK should be proud of our world-leading food, health, and animal welfare standards, and we will not lower our standards as we negotiate new trade deals. Indeed, new FTAs offer considerable opportunities to high quality UK producers, with tariff reductions and other provisions helping to drive growth, promote efficient and sustainable food production, while providing consumers with an even greater choice of products that meet the high standards they have come to expect.

To that end, DIT recently launched a new Trade and Agriculture Commission. This commission, in its advisory role, will bring together stakeholders across the industry, using their expertise to advise on how best the UK can seize new export opportunities, while ensuring animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined. It will provide advice to inform our approach as we negotiate free trade deals and promote our agenda at the WTO, among other international fora, and to advance and protect consumer interests and those of developing countries.

Finally, an FTA can support the UK's climate change objectives by promoting new job and business growth opportunities in low carbon technologies, services, and systems. Nothing in the deal will stop us taking the domestic action necessary to deliver our commitment to net zero by 2050.

I hope that my reply clarifies the Government's position and addresses your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G Hands', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

THE RT HON GREG HANDS MP
Minister of State for Trade Policy
Department for International Trade