Lord Boswell of Aynho,
Chair, European Union Committee
House of Lords,
London,
SW1A 0PW

29th October 2018

Dear Lord Boswell,

Thank you for providing copy correspondence between yourself and the Under Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union in response to the issues I have raised on behalf of the Government of Anguilla. In the light of the conduct of the Brexit negotiations to date, we must thank the Under Secretary of State for taking the time to delve further into the position of the territory and the unavoidable issues it must face. The UK government’s mantra that nothing will change as a result of Brexit for Anguilla is a sentiment that is not readily shared by the EU Commission, nor senior officials of the relevant members states whose interest in the Caribbean have some bearing on the lives and livelihoods of the 15,000 British citizens of Anguilla. Those officials have advised us that unless Anguilla’s position is expressly tabled in the Withdrawal process it cannot be subsequently negotiated. Whilst we note the Department for Exiting the European Union’s stance that the relationships between the islands lie firmly outside of the Brexit process, we respectfully beg to differ, in so doing according with the views of the EU Commission, the French and Dutch, each of whom recognise that the political relations between the sovereign states will unavoidably influence how the islands are permitted to interact, even if temporarily.
Whilst the conduct of external affairs in respect of Anguilla are the constitutional obligation of the sovereign state, the lack of institutional knowledge, high turn over of staff, limited official data and dearth of unofficial data and local knowledge held within HMG continue to cause concern, as does the fact that attempts by HMG to interact with the French and Dutch directly on this matter have been stifled. It is, however, good to see a marked improvement in the quality of interaction at local level under the auspices of our excellent new governor, Tim Foy, and Minister of State, Lord Ahmad, nonetheless, the political risks still pertain.

At the JMC to which Mr Walker refers the territories were invited by a senior FCO official to address preparedness and contingency measures in readiness for a no deal Brexit, coupled with potential acrimony. This we have done, with the benefit of our in-depth working knowledge of the longstanding socio-economic relationships between the peoples of the Dutch, French and British islands, including the provision of key medical and educational services.

Anguilla, as with all British Overseas Territories, is deemed to be a contingent liability of the UK. We must therefore all note that the UK government has chosen to react to problems rather than prepare to mitigate the risk. We also appreciate that given the multitude of other Brexit issues that remain outstanding at this critically late stage in the negotiations, there is unlikely to be an improvement made on this position. Needless to say, we all sincerely hope that this approach will not be found wanting to the detriment of the lives and livelihoods of thousands of British citizens in Anguilla who are only just recovering from one of the worst natural disasters this British nation has ever known.

With regard to the revision of the UK's international aid strategy, like a considerable section of the UK public, we find the current position to be both illogical and inappropriate, particularly in a humanitarian context. We may only hope to avoid the consequences of climate change that, we are told, will increase the frequency and ferocity of the annual hurricane season; and trust that, if the UK's deliberation should take the years that OECD officials predict, some alternative support mechanism be orchestrated.

We end by wishing you well in the conduct of the Brexit negotiations, and in hoping that Anguilla's vital, mutually beneficial trade with Saint Martin in respect of both imports and exports is addressed as a subject that has not yet been refuted by HMG as lying within the realms of Brexit.
May I end by thanking both you and your committee members for the concern and support shown to Anguilla. Without avenues such as these, the voice of Anguilla would, sadly, be mute. I must also reiterate my thanks to the Under Secretary of State for his personal input during such a challenging time for us all.

Yours,

Mrs Blondel Cluff CBE
Representative of the Government of Anguilla to the UK and EU and
Special Adviser to the Chief Minister of Anguilla

cc The Hon Victor Banks

The Hon Robin Walker MP