



# International Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for International Trade  
King Charles Street  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AH

7 February 2019

*Dear Liam*

Thank you for your letters of 14 January regarding the appearance before my Committee of the Chair and Chief Executive Designates of the Trade Remedies Authority (TRA) and the secondary legislation that will be required to make the TRA operational.

Further to the evidence session my Committee held on 16 January, and previous correspondence on this matter, I want to raise the significant concerns that we have around the establishment and future operational effectiveness of the TRA. These concerns are particularly pertinent given the present political situation around Brexit. The TRA will have responsibility for protecting UK businesses from unfair trading practices when the UK ceases to be bound by the Common Commercial Policy. With every day that the current stalemate continues, the likelihood increases that this will be the situation from 29 March 2019, in consequence of a “no deal” Brexit occurring on that date.

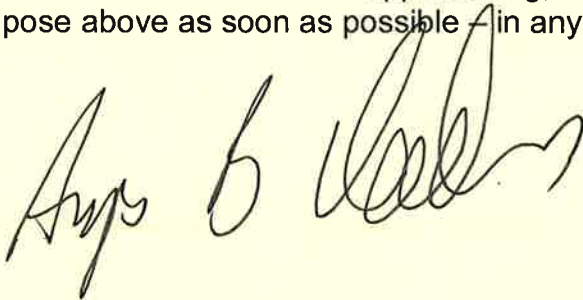
My Committee notes the Government’s defeat in the Lords in relation to the Trade Bill, requiring you to provide further information on scrutiny of post-Brexit trade agreements before the Bill can progress to its report stage in the Upper House. Given that the Trade Bill will enable the TRA to be legally constituted, the Bill’s passage through Parliament is clearly of the utmost importance for the formation of the Authority. We would, therefore, appreciate receiving, as a matter of urgency, information on how and when your Department intends to comply with this amendment. Naturally, we hope that in complying with this amendment, you set out plans which are in accordance with the recommendations we made in our recent report on Trade Policy Transparency and Scrutiny.

During your appearance before my Committee yesterday, you told us that, should the Trade Bill not be passed in time for Brexit, you would have “contingency plans to ensure that it [the TRA] is able to be fully operational.” I would be grateful if you could set out, in response to this letter, what those contingency plans are. I would also be grateful if you would clarify whether your contingency plans extend to a scenario where the Trade Bill *does* pass in time for 29 March, but where there is insufficient time for

the relevant secondary legislation – which, in your own words, “provides for most of the technical and complex detail of the [trade remedies] system” – to pass into law.

My Committee is also concerned that the Chair Designate of the TRA is presumably still not yet in post, and that the Chief Executive Designate, Claire Bassett, has only been in place for a matter of weeks. In evidence to the Committee on 16 January, we were informed that the TRA is still in the process of recruiting and training staff and that, at the time of Ms Bassett giving evidence, only one third of the staff already in place had completed their training. This is highly concerning, given that we are a matter of weeks away from a scenario where the TRA needs to be fully operational.

Given that 29 March is fast approaching, I would be grateful for a reply to the questions I pose above as soon as possible – in any case by Friday 15 February.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angus B MacNeil', written in a cursive style.

Angus Brendan MacNeil  
Chair of the International Trade Committee