



HOUSE OF LORDS
European Union Committee

House of Lords
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Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment
Defra, Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
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Dear Dr Coffey,

The House of Lords' EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee is currently examining the potential impact of Brexit on the UK's trade in waste. At our meeting on 22 November, we held a roundtable discussion on this issue with nine witnesses representing different parts of the waste industry.

As you will be aware, the UK exports 3-4m tonnes of material for recycling to the EU each year, as well as c. 4 m tonnes of waste for fuel. The UK also imports some waste for processing from other EU countries.

Witnesses identified a wide range of potential impacts of Brexit, including:

- The introduction of tariff, and non-tariff, barriers. The Committee heard concerns that if it becomes more difficult, and more costly, to export waste then this could result in more waste being sent to landfill in the UK, or illegally dumped, or being exported to non-EU countries with lower environmental standards.
- The UK developing its own waste policies. Witnesses identified opportunities for the UK Government to develop policies that would support the waste management industry and improve environmental standards, but also concerns that policy divergence could make the trade in waste more difficult. Being part of the EU has provided long term certainty for the industry, in terms of policy direction; leaving the EU removes this certainty.
- Restrictions on the movement of labour. This was identified as a significant business risk for some companies, both in terms of restrictions on their ability to move highly specialist staff between operating bases in different counties and in terms of reliance on lower skilled labour from other EU countries.
- The UK no longer being able to accept imports of waste from EU countries. EU regulations prohibit Member States exporting waste for disposal outside of the EU, and Members heard that this would pose significant problems for the Republic of

Ireland in particular, who currently export about 40% of their hazardous waste to the UK.

- On Gibraltar, which is heavily reliant on being able to export waste to Spain.
- On the legal framework. As well as the need to transcribe EU legislation into UK law, the Committee heard that UK courts often refer to EU jurisprudence when considering legal cases.

The overwhelming consensus of witnesses was that there was an urgent need for the UK Government to provide clarity on both the post-Brexit trade arrangements and on the UK's future policy direction. The Committee heard evidence that Brexit could provide real and positive opportunities for the UK's trade in waste, but that the industry needs certainty in order to be able to plan and invest. Without a clear statement on the Government's future intentions – in relation to recycling targets, regulations on product design, the adoption of the Circular Economy Package and Extended Producer Responsibilities, for example – the industry cannot predict, or prepare for, future demand.

These issues have been made more pressing due to the current situation with China. As you will be aware, the UK currently exports significant amounts of waste to China for recycling (including 55% of all plastics we export) but the Chinese have recently announced major restrictions on this trade. With the increased pressure that this will put on the UK's waste industry, the need for clarity on the impact of Brexit is even greater.

The Committee is very keen that the opportunities arising from Brexit, both for the waste management sector in the UK and for the environment, are maximised. We would like to invite you to attend a future meeting of the Committee, to address some of the concerns raised by witnesses and to share the Government's vision for the UK's future trade in waste. Our Clerk (Alexandra McMillan; mcmillana@parliament.uk) will be in touch with your officials to discuss this further.

Kind regards,



Lord Teverson
Chairman, EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee