

Back the Australian trade deal

The UK has now rolled over the EU deals with other countries as promised in the referendum. The draft Australian Free Trade Agreement could be the first of the new UK negotiated deals, which will go much further than the EU went in opening up opportunities for more trade and business activity. The Australian one will go some way to restore the losses we experienced with Australia thanks to EU protectionism against them. Australia is a key ally and partner, a fellow member of the 5 Eyes Group and a willing collaborator. For example, Australia is buying the rights and support to build 9 Type 26 UK designed frigates.

The Agreement will sweep away tariffs and quotas, and open up services. It will provide great opportunities for the UK dairy industry to sell more UK cheeses, the whisky industry to sell more drink and the car industry to sell more vehicles. UK consumers will have access to some great Australian products at cheaper prices, with a likely rise in interest in Australian wines as one of the consumer wins.

Some now say we need to offer protection to our beef and sheep meat sectors through tariff quotas to limit the amount of product Australia can sell us at better prices. To argue in this way is to seek to wreck the agreement. Australia has rightly not signed Free Trade Agreements with any country whilst accepting tariff rate quotas. The people who think the UK needs this protection from food produced on the other side of the world did not of course offer any such protection from EU food products, where we have tariff and quota free food trade and plenty of EU imports. It is difficult to believe our beef and sheep meat sectors will lose out to Australia given the distances involved and the relative costs. Australia has high standards of animal welfare and husbandry. UK beef and sheep meat are quality products with plenty of scope for us to export more and to sell more at home.

We owe it to ourselves and to Australia to do this deal. When we joined the EEC we turned our backs on Australia and other Commonwealth allies, placing heavy barriers in the way of their exports to us to give a big advantage to European product. Australia is a willing friend keen to promote our joint interests by freer trade. Doing a deal with Australia also gets us closer and sooner to a deal with CPTPP, the Pacific partnership countries. That is another large prize, a free trade deal with the fastest growing part of the world.