

Trade and Agriculture Commission put on statutory footing

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss is today extending the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC), and placing it on a full statutory footing, giving farmers a stronger voice in UK trade policy.

The Commission was initially launched for a six-month period in July to bring together voices from across the sector and report back to inform top-level trade policy and negotiations.

Since then it has heard from dozens of experts on farming, animal welfare, the environment and trade, called for evidence from hundreds of key voices across the industry, as well as engaging local farmers, producers, businesses and MPs across the UK through a series of virtual regional roadshows.

Now, as Britain prepares to put into statute the trade deal struck with Japan and moves closer to becoming a fully-fledged trading nation, the Government has decided to extend the Commission past its previous fixed term and give it a more active role through a new legislative underpinning, to be reviewed every three years.

It will produce a report on the impact on animal welfare and agriculture of each free trade deal the government signs after the end of the EU transition period on January 1. This report will be laid in Parliament before the start of the 21-day scrutiny period under the terms of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act.

The move – part of the government’s ambition to place farmers at the heart of its trade policy – will allow Parliamentarians access to independent and expert advice when reviewing the impact of each trade deal on farming.

The commission will continue to report to Truss and will continue with the report it is currently producing, which will advise on:

- Trade policies the Government should adopt to secure opportunities for UK farmers, to ensure that animal welfare, food production and environmental standards are not undermined and to identify new export opportunities.
- Advancing and protecting British consumer interests and those of developing countries.
- How the UK engages the WTO to build a coalition that helps advance higher animal welfare standards across the world.
- Developing trade policy that identifies and opens up new export opportunities for the UK agricultural industry – in particular for SMEs – and that benefits the UK economy as a whole.

The Commission is publishing an interim report shortly, and the full report will be published in February 2021 and presented to Parliament.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

As trade secretary, I want deals that deliver for British farmers and help them sell more brilliant produce around the world. I will never sign up to anything that threatens their ability to compete, or that undermines their high standards.

Our trade policy is deeply rooted in British values – democracy, the rule of law, human rights and a fierce commitment to high food and farming standards. Any deal that does not abide by those values or deliver for vital industries like agriculture will remain firmly on the shelf.

The Trade and Agriculture Commission is an important part of our vision for a values-led and value-generating trade policy. It is about putting British farming at the heart of our trade agenda, and ensuring the interests of farmers and consumers are promoted and advanced as we move closer to becoming an independent trading nation on January 1st.

George Eustice, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said:

By putting the Trade and Agriculture Commission on a statutory footing, we are ensuring that the voices of our farmers, as well as those of consumers and key environmental and animal welfare groups, continue to be heard while we are in the process of scrutinising future trade deals.

The food producers that we have in this country are second to none, and we know that there is a growing global demand for our great British produce.

We will always back Britain's farmers and food producers and will make sure they can seize the vast range of opportunities outside of the EU, so that their world-famous produce can continue to be enjoyed all around the world.

Tim Smith, chair of the TAC, said:

From a standing start in July the Trade and Agriculture Commission has been able to cover a huge amount of ground and I know that it will play a key role in establishing independent scrutiny of Britain's new trade deals. It's good to know that our contribution is being recognised in this way.

Britain has fantastic farmers and growers producing high quality food to world leading standards. Our job is to use evidence from a

wide range of experts and with diverse opinions to establish our trading priorities for when we report to Parliament in February.

NFU President, Minette Batters said:

The decision to extend the Trade and Agriculture Commission and put it on a statutory footing in order that it can report on any new trade deals for scrutiny in parliament will be hugely welcomed by Britain's farmers.

This demonstrates the government's commitment to not only safeguarding our standards of production in future trade deals but demonstrates an ambition to be global leaders in animal welfare and environmental protection. We look forward to working with the Department for International Trade and Defra in our shared ambition to export high quality British food around the world.

The government has been consistently clear that in all trade negotiations, the UK will not compromise on its high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

During trade negotiations, the Department for International Trade consults widely with its agri-food Trade Advisory Group, comprised of farmers and other senior figures from across the industry. The Government also has a suite of tools – including tariffs, tariff quotas and safeguards – to ensure that British farmers with their high standards are not unfairly undercut in any trade deal.

On Friday, the government tabled an amendment to the Agriculture Bill, to bolster parliamentary scrutiny of free trade agreements. It will place a duty on the Government to report to Parliament on whether, or to what extent, commitments in new Free Trade Agreements relating to agricultural goods are consistent with maintaining UK levels of statutory protection in relation to human, animal and plant life and health; animal welfare; and environmental protection. This report will be laid at the same time, or ahead of, any FTA laid before Parliament, demonstrating how we are meeting our commitments on standards.