

# News story: US-UK Trade Working Group lays groundwork for potential future free trade agreement

The International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, and the US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, jointly chaired the plenary session of the first meeting of UK-US Trade and Investment Working Group on Monday 24 July.

The first meeting of the Trade Working Group, made up of representatives from several US and UK government agencies and delegations from the UK and US, will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU and exploring ways to strengthen trade and investment ties ahead of the exit.

The Working Group will also begin to lay the groundwork for a potential, future free trade agreement once the UK has left the EU, and explore where we can collaborate to promote open markets around the world.

International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP said:

It is a testament to the political will in both countries that this Working Group is meeting just a month after Ambassador Lighthizer and I discussed it in June. This will be our forum to strengthen the bilateral trade and investment relationship and deepen the already extensive economic ties between the UK and US.

The immediate priority is to give businesses on both sides of the Atlantic certainty and confidence. Early discussions will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU.

The working group will also start to lay the ground work for potential negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement. The US is our single largest trading partner therefore we have a strong foundation on which to build.

US Trade Representative, Ambassador Robert Lighthizer said:

I warmly welcome Dr Fox and his team back to Washington to kick off the first meeting of the US-UK Trade and Investment Working Group.

We expect this Working Group to be a key mechanism to deepen our

already strong bilateral trade and investment relationship, and to lay the groundwork for our future trade relationship once the UK has left the EU.

I look forward to building on our already strong economic relationship and furthering our mutual goal of achieving free and fair trade and investment to create good-paying jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trade between the two countries is already worth about £150 billion a year.

The US is the single biggest source of inward investment into the UK, and, according to US statistics, the UK and US have around \$1 trillion invested in each other's economies.

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## **News story: Lifeboat charities to receive £1 million grant boost**

Local rescue services will benefit from £1 million in funding to help ensure the safety of water users across the UK.

The money, made available by the 'Inshore and inland rescue boat grant scheme', can be used to purchase lifesaving equipment, such as boats, life jackets and safety gear.

Maritime Minister John Hayes said:

We value and support the lifesaving work that goes on every day by our dedicated local waterway rescue services. Their commitment and skills keep our rivers, lakes and inshore areas safe.

The additional funds provided by the scheme will ensure that these tireless volunteers and charities can get the boats, equipment and other resources they need to provide round-the-clock lifesaving services.

Since its launch in 2014, the scheme has made a real difference to local rescue services, having helped over 80 charities in their role to assist those in danger on and around our waterways.

Earlier this year, Portsmouth and Southsea Voluntary Lifeguards used a lifeboat funded by the grant scheme to save the lives of those on board 2

different vessels off the coast of Portsmouth.

View a [map of charities](#) that have benefited from over £2.6 million of government funding over the last 3 years.

Charities have until 6 September to submit their bids to the Department for Transport, which is running the scheme with advice from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Royal Yachting Association and devolved administrations.

Read about [how to apply under the 2017 to 2018 scheme and eligibility requirements](#).

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## [Press release: Crackdown on unfair leasehold practices](#)

Radical new proposals to cut out unfair abuses of leasehold have been announced by the government today (25 July 2017) in a major move that will deliver a fairer, more transparent system for homebuyers.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has set out plans to ban new build houses being sold as leasehold as well as restricting ground rents to as low as zero. This can often expose homebuyers to unreasonable and long-term financial abuse.

Leasehold generally applies to flats with shared spaces, but developers – particularly in the north west – have been increasingly selling houses on these terms.

With 1.2 million leasehold houses currently recorded in England and the number of leasehold sales rapidly growing, the government is taking crucial action to make future leases fairer.

Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

It's clear that far too many new houses are being built and sold as leaseholds, exploiting home buyers with unfair agreements and spiraling ground rents. Enough is enough. These practices are unjust, unnecessary and need to stop.

Our proposed changes will help make sure leasehold works in the best interests of homebuyers now and in the future.

Other measures, which are now subject to an [8-week consultation](#), include:

- setting ground rents to zero levels – in recent years these have increased significantly, in some cases doubling every 10 years
- closing legal loopholes to protect consumers – such as leaving some leaseholders vulnerable to possession orders
- changing the rules on Help to Buy equity loans so that the scheme can only be used to support new build houses on acceptable terms

The terms of some leases are becoming increasingly onerous to those purchasing leasehold flat or house, who often find they need to pay thousands of pounds to their freeholder to make simple changes to their homes. Recent cases include:

- a homeowner being charged £1,500 by the company to make a small alteration to their home
- a family house that is now unsaleable because the ground rent is expected to hit £10,000 a year by 2060
- a homeowner who was told buying the lease would cost £2,000 but the bill came to £40,000

Ground rents are charged on all residential leasehold properties but evidence shows that they are becoming increasingly expensive. Under government plans they could be reduced so that they relate to real costs incurred, and are fair and transparent to the consumer.

The proposed prohibiting of future houses being sold as leasehold will apply to all houses apart from a few exceptional circumstances where leasehold is still needed – such as houses that have shared services or built on land with specific restrictions.

The [consultation](#) will last for 8 weeks from Tuesday 25 July 2017.

These proposals relate to England only.

Department for Communities and Local Government [statistics](#) estimate there were 4 million residential leasehold dwellings in England in the private sector in 2014 to 2015 and of these 1.2 million were leasehold houses.

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## [Press release: Simon Hart MP joins the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#)

Simon Hart MP has been appointed as the Conservative party member of the independent Committee on Standards in Public life.

The [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and

reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.

The Committee is made up of an independent Chair, 4 independent members appointed by the Prime Minister following open competition in accordance with the [Public Appointments Governance Code](#), and 3 political members appointed by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the leaders of the main parties.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life is currently conducting a short review of the issue of [intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates](#), and the broader implications of this for other holders of public office, following a request from the Prime Minister. The Committee has published the terms of reference for this review and published a [call for evidence](#) yesterday.

## Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. Simon Hart is Conservative MP for Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire, first elected in May 2010. Since being elected Simon has been a member of the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee, the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. He has also been a member/Chair of several APPGs including Tourism in Wales, Learning outside the Classroom, Marine Energy & Tidal Lagoons, EU/US Trade, and others. Additionally, Simon sits on the UK Delegation of the OSCE PA and is Chairman of the United & Cecil Club. Prior to being elected he was Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance, and remains Chairman of the organisation.
3. Simon Hart MP replaces Dame Angela Watkinson DBE who stood down at the 2017 election.
4. The other members of the Committee are: Lord (Paul) Bew, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP, Dr Jane Martin CBE, Sheila Drew Smith OBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah, and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell.

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## [News story: Saturn surprises as Cassini continues its Grand Finale](#)

This observation, which means the true length of Saturn's day is still unknown, is one of several early findings from the final phase of Cassini's mission, known as the Grand Finale.

Other recent science highlights include promising hints about the structure and composition of the icy rings, along with high-resolution images of the rings and Saturn's atmosphere.

Cassini is now in the 15th of 22 weekly orbits that pass through the narrow gap between Saturn and its rings. The spacecraft began its finale on 26 April and will continue its dives until 15 September, when it will make a mission-ending plunge into Saturn's atmosphere.

The UK has involvement on 4 instruments onboard the Cassini spacecraft, including as the Principal Investigator for the magnetometer, built to measure planetary and inter-planetary magnetic fields and developed by a team at Imperial College, London.

Professor Michele Dougherty, Cassini magnetometer investigation lead at Imperial College, London, said:

The instrument and the spacecraft were originally designed to be in orbit at Saturn for four years and 13 years later we are still there and everything is in really good shape! What we should remember is that neither Cassini nor the instruments were designed to carry out these Grand Finale orbits, for the magnetometer we have had to roll the spacecraft on a number of occasions in order to get the most accurate measurements.

The final critical rolls are taking place today (25 July 2017). The spectacular science being revealed is a testament to the fantastic spacecraft and science teams that have enabled these Grand Finale orbits to happen. The observations to date from the magnetic field are very surprising and certainly not as we expected.

## **Early Magnetic Field Analysis**

Based on data collected by Cassini's magnetometer instrument, Saturn's magnetic field appears to be surprisingly well aligned with the planet's rotation axis. The tilt is much smaller than 0.06 degrees – which is the lower limit the magnetometer data placed on the value prior to the start of the Grand Finale.

This observation is at odds with scientists' theoretical understanding of how magnetic fields are generated. Planetary magnetic fields are understood to require some degree of tilt in order to sustain currents flowing through the liquid metal deep inside the planet (in Saturn's case, this is thought to be liquid metallic hydrogen). With no tilt, the currents would eventually subside and the field would disappear.

Any tilt to the magnetic field would make the daily wobble of the planet's deep interior observable, thus revealing the true length of Saturn's day, which has so far proved elusive.

Professor Dougherty said:

The tilt seems to be much smaller than we had previously estimated and quite challenging to explain. We have not been able to resolve the length of day at Saturn so far, but we're still working on it.

The lack of a tilt may eventually be rectified with further data. Dougherty and her team believe some aspect of the planet's deep atmosphere might be masking the true internal magnetic field. The team will continue to collect and analyze data for the remainder of the mission, including during the final plunge into Saturn.

The magnetometer data will also be evaluated in concert with Cassini's measurements of Saturn's gravity field collected during the Grand Finale. Early analysis of the gravity data collected so far shows discrepancies compared with parts of the leading models of Saturn's interior, suggesting something unexpected about the planet's structure is awaiting discovery.

## **Sampling Saturn**

In addition to its investigation of the planet's interior, Cassini has now obtained the first samples of the planet's atmosphere and main rings, which promise new insights about their composition and structure. The spacecraft's cosmic dust analyzer (CDA) instrument has collected many nanometer-size ring particles while flying through the planet-ring gap, while its ion and neutral mass spectrometer (INMS) has sniffed the outermost atmosphere, called the exosphere.

During the spacecraft's final five orbits and final plunge, the INMS instrument will obtain samples deeper down in the atmosphere. Cassini will skim through the outer atmosphere during these passes, and INMS is expected to send particularly important data on the composition of Saturn's atmosphere during the final plunge.

In addition, Cassini's imaging cameras have returned some of the highest-resolution views of the rings and planet they have ever obtained. For example, close-up views of Saturn's C ring – which features mysterious bright bands called plateaus – reveal surprisingly different textures in neighboring sections of the ring.

Launched in 1997, Cassini has orbited Saturn since arriving in 2004 for an up-close study of the planet, its rings and moons, and its vast magnetosphere. Cassini has made numerous discoveries, including a global ocean with indications of hydrothermal activity within the moon Enceladus, and liquid methane seas on another moon, Titan.

The Cassini-Huygens mission is a cooperative project of NASA, ESA (European Space Agency) and the Italian Space Agency. NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a division of Caltech in Pasadena, California, manages the mission for NASA's Science Mission Directorate, Washington. JPL designed, developed and assembled the Cassini orbiter.

Image credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/Space Science Institute