Contrôles sanitaires et phytosanitaires aux frontières de l'UE

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(Extrait : réponse de la Sous-secrétaire d'État parlementaire, Département de l'Environnement, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Baronne Hayman d'Ullock), aux questions posées en séance) – **Texte original -**

My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, for bringing this debate in front of us today and for giving me the opportunity to respond for the Government on this matter. I also thank all noble Lords from all sides of the House for their thoughtful and constructive contributions to today's debate, which has come the day before the second UK-EU summit. I welcome especially my noble friend Lady Sarpong to the Labour Benches and thank her for her words in support of the SPS agreement today. She talked about cutting red tape, the benefits for SMEs and growth. I also echo her comments on the great loss to the House of Baroness Margaret McDonagh.

My noble friend Lady Sarpong and the noble Lord, Lord O'Neill, raised some important points on Africa and trade. Defra has two agricultural attachés based in Africa, with the important aim of increasing market access and providing insights and support, so that exporters can enter and expand into the African market.

Having said that, the Government are committed to building a closer, more ambitious relationship with Europe. Our relationship with the EU is fundamental to delivering our domestic economic agenda and delivering growth to every postcode. It is clear that leaving the EU has done more harm than good, as between 2018 and 2025 agri-food trade exports to the EU fell by 24%. The trade and co-operation agreement introduced barriers impacting over 1,500 products, with 61% of those accounting for agri-food. This does not need to be the case with our closest trading partner.

Behind every barrier is a real person whose livelihood has been held back by the bureaucracy of current trading arrangements—the cheesemaker in Somerset whose export business is hard, the farmer in Scotland who can no longer sell seed potatoes to customers they have supplied for decades, the shellfish trader in Wales who has had to turn down orders because their catch is not fresh by the time they have completed their

paperwork, and the grocery shop in Northern Ireland which faces unnecessary bureaucracy when receiving goods from Great Britain.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hoey, asked why this agreement is needed. The summit tomorrow is an important milestone in resetting our relationship with the EU and delivering practical benefits for British businesses and consumers. Our focus is on translating this strengthened partnership into tangible economic benefits, removing costly bureaucracy and making trade both easier and cheaper.

The Government have been negotiating an ambitious but pragmatic SPS agreement with the EU to cut red tape, boost British exports, strengthen supply chains, open opportunities for British food and drink businesses, and drive economic growth. The agreement will reduce costs associated with non-tariff measures applicable to exports of agri-food, plant, fish and seafood products from Great Britain to the EU. It will remove export health certificates, which is expected to save businesses up to £200 per certificate. The agreement as a whole could increase the volume of UK exports of major agricultural commodities to the EU by around 16%. British goods such as dairy, fish, eggs and red meat are currently subject to 100% paperwork checks and up to 30% physical checks. This agreement will remove these entirely. Trade in products such as fresh sausages, burgers, seed potatoes and some live bivalve molluscs from class B waters will be able to resume, and that will reopen the UK market for those goods. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, and my noble friend Lord Murphy for recognising these benefits.

Of course, until the summit takes place tomorrow, I cannot comment on the contents of the agreement in detail, but engagement with Parliament will be central to taking it forward. Members across both Houses bring considerable expertise, and their scrutiny of what will be agreed and how it is implemented will be invaluable. We will continue to engage closely with parliamentary colleagues and will update the relevant Select Committees following the summit, along with publishing guidance on our website to help businesses prepare. **To answer the question from the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, the expected date for this entering into force is spring 2028.**

The Government's goal is to bring down as many trade barriers with our nearest and largest trading partner as possible. To that end, the agreement is based on the model of dynamic alignment, which is in the best interest of all four nations of the United Kingdom because it delivers this prize for as many British agri-food exporters as possible by reducing the costs of certification checks at the border. Many British agri-food exporters already follow EU requirements in practice to keep selling their goods, and, once the agreement is implemented, they will continue to do so with less bureaucracy, saving valuable time on onerous paperwork.

The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, and others correctly identified that there are other trade agreements based on equivalence provisions, with particular reference to arrangements between New Zealand and the EU. While this simplifies checks for a limited selection of goods, it does not remove the need for all paperwork or documentary checks at the border. New Zealand is not part of a shared SPS area of the EU. I also note that the volume of trade between the EU and New Zealand is substantially lower than our trade with the EU, and that New Zealand is, of course, geographically much further away. It is important to point out that New Zealand cannot export goods such as fresh minced red meat, and many goods such as live animals, fish, dairy and composite products still require documentary and identity checks, and, in some cases, still need physical checks.

I highlight to the House that ensuring that Northern Ireland benefits from this agreement has been at the heart of the negotiations. Dynamic alignment in the areas covered by the agreement will allow benefits to extend across the United Kingdom, subject to agreed exceptions, and through the agreement's interaction with the Windsor Framework. Nearly all friction arising from SPS requirements on movements from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will be removed by eliminating the vast majority of checks, certification and labelling requirements for goods in scope.

It is important to add that dynamic alignment does not mean every UK rule will automatically mirror the EU's. The Government have been pursuing specific exceptions where it is important for the UK to retain its own rules. More details will become available after the summit. The Government are making a pragmatic choice to pursue common rules in defined areas where that removes costly barriers to trade and supports growth. We will be able to engage early on relevant future EU measures, and to raise evidence and concerns where UK interests may be affected.

I assure the House that facilitating a safe trade in agri-food is a priority for this Government. Defra has already begun work to make sure our border is ready for the new agreement while continuing to protect our biosecurity. Our strong protections and risk-based measures will continue to safeguard the United Kingdom's biosecurity for the future. In fact, they will strengthen co-operation on biosecurity, including through access to EU agencies, systems and databases and greater sharing of data, science and evidence. The UK will play a key role alongside EU member states in protecting the shared UK-EU SPS area from external biosecurity and public health risks. Importantly, we will still be able to take targeted action where threats arise, in the same way as EU member states do, including national measures in response to specific threats.

I now come to some specific questions. I will do my best in the time I have but there are a lot to get through, so I will write to any noble Lords whose questions I have missed.

Obviously, there will be many opportunities to discuss this in more detail in the coming weeks.

The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, asked whether this would make food from non-EU countries more expensive and undermine other trade deals. We remain an independent trading nation, free to negotiate and conclude trade deals worldwide. The agreement may change checks on some non-EU imports, but many major imports will face no additional checks. Our priority is to keep costs down. Removing barriers with our largest agri-food trading partner will cut costs and delays for businesses. We will have smoother trade with the EU, while still maintaining strong global trading partnerships.

The WTO rules were mentioned by a number of noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, my noble friend Lady Chapman and the noble Lord, Lord Carlile. While there is obviously a World Trade Organization SPS agreement that sets the baseline rules, a core tenet of that agreement is that members have the right to set their appropriate level of SPS protection. In this context, the UK-EU SPS agreement benefits the UK by establishing a common SPS area within the EU, but it is for the EU to speak to its view of its World Trade Organization SPS agreement obligations. However, it makes it very clear that World Trade Organization members can determine their own appropriate level of protection. A UK-EU SPS agreement based on deep integration works best for UK biosecurity, and the deal provides access to EU agency systems and databases.

The noble Baroness, Lady Lawlor, suggested that we were breaking international agreements. It is usual practice for WTO members to apply SPS controls to each other. This is not, in principle, a breach of WTO obligations. While we will always advocate for British exports, we also recognise that the EU has a right to currently apply SPS controls to trade from the UK, in line with its WTO and TCA obligations.

The noble Lord, Lord Redwood, and the noble Baroness, Lady Lawlor, talked about the importance of supporting farmers. Absolutely; we have been working closely with the farming industry as we go through the negotiations, including with the NFU. It has been involved with Defra throughout SPS agreement negotiations. We will continue to talk to and engage with it as we prepare for the operation of the agreement. The noble Lord also asked about the budget. Clearly, I cannot comment on a budget that is months away.

The noble Lord, Lord Redwood, also asked about EU payments. Payments are subject to negotiations and we will discuss making proportionate payments for access to the systems and databases that we need as part of the agreement.

Northern Ireland was mentioned by a number of noble Lords. My noble friend Lord Murphy has done a huge amount of work in this area. The Windsor Framework will, of

course, continue to apply in Northern Ireland. However, once the SPS agreement has been implemented, its benefits will extend to Northern Ireland through the interplay with the Windsor Framework, creating opportunities to further smooth trade within the UK internal market system. This means the vast majority of goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will no longer need certificates or agri-food checks. Additionally, the vast majority of goods will no longer require "Not for EU" labelling. This will change the need for Windsor Framework schemes such as the Northern Ireland plant health label scheme, which will close.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hoey, suggested that removing border controls could undermine biosecurity. The SPS agreement will not remove our biosecurity protections; strong protections and risk-based measures will continue to safeguard UK biosecurity and maintain our high standards. Importantly, as I have just mentioned, it will strengthen co-operation on biosecurity, including through access to EU agencies, systems and databases and greater sharing of data, science and evidence. The UK will play a key role alongside EU member states in protecting the shared UK-EU SPS area from external biosecurity and public health risks. Importantly, the agreement does not mean an end to border controls. Border control posts and control points will continue to be required for relevant rest-of-world imports and some high-risk commodities from the EU, including live animals, germinal products and some plants, which will still require documentation and/or inspection at destination premises.

It is worth pointing out that I am in fact going to Northern Ireland next week. I will have two days in Belfast meeting businesses and Ministers to discuss the best way to work with Northern Ireland as we move towards implementation. As my noble friend Lord Murphy said, businesses there are very welcoming of this agreement; I have worked for a long time with businesses in Northern Ireland. It removes routine SPS checks for the vast majority of goods—something for which those businesses in Northern Ireland have been asking me for two years.

The noble Lord, Lord Carlile, asked about business support and business readiness. We absolutely understand that businesses need clarity on forthcoming changes, implementation timelines and legislative requirements to plan effectively. We have been learning from the mistakes made during Brexit, when there were too many changes and businesses did not have clarity. They have been very clear that that is what they need for this. Businesses will receive an explanation of the agreement, updated GOV.UK information and a forward look setting out what they should do now, what further information will be provided, and when. It is an absolute priority for this Government and for Defra to deliver clear and timely information, and we will publish what we can as negotiations proceed.

On the way in which businesses are consulted, Defra ran a call for information in spring 2026 to hear from them directly about what they need, and a summary of responses was published on GOV.UK. The call for information found strong anticipated benefits: 68% of respondents expect reduced compliance costs, around half anticipate improved market access and reduced import costs, and half expect increased exports. Businesses currently trading with the EU were particularly positive, highlighting the prospect of reduced paperwork, fewer border checks and lower certification costs as meaningful near-term gains. We have also established an SPS agreement business advisory council, which I personally chair, alongside other sector subgroups, to ensure that businesses and government are working in partnership to implement the new agreement. I thank the businesses and trade associations for taking part in that close partnership working. This feedback has helped shape our policy development and the practical guidance and support we provide. We have extensive practical guidance ready, and businesses of all sizes will benefit from day one. I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, that this includes Northern Ireland and that Northern Ireland Members are involved in those discussions.

The guidance will also include particular tools and implementation support as the delivery arrangements mature. The idea is that it should be very hands-on, which is why we are working with trade associations and businesses to ensure that the guidance reflects what they need to know, and that it reaches businesses throughout the entire supply chain, supporting them in understanding the practical information. This will ensure that they can properly prepare for implementation.

The noble Lord, Lord Carlile, asked about the one-stop shop. We are making good progress on the design and development of the enhanced one-stop service; I know it is frustrating that we are not there yet. We expect it to be live this financial year, and we are grateful to businesses and stakeholders for supporting us in developing it.

Fishing was mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Redwood, and the noble Baroness, Lady Grender. The Government have secured a deal that ensures returns to our fishing community. We are looking to scrap red tape and restore shellfish exports to the EU, which is particularly important for Wales, protecting the significant quota uplift that came with the Brexit deal and maintaining regulatory autonomy for UK waters. We understand that UK fisheries need long-term certainty, and we are committed to the long-term prosperity and sustainability of our fishing industry.

The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, asked about sovereignty and decision-shaping. We are obviously not seeking a vote on EU legislation, but the UK will have a very meaningful role in shaping decisions affecting the common SPS area. As I said before, we need to bring people together. UK science, regulation and industry expertise needs to be in the development of the relevant rules, and the impact and value of that should not be

understated. Our objective is to influence upstream while policy is being developed, rather than simply responding.

On precision breeding, I cannot comment on the detail before tomorrow's summit, but we have been absolutely clear about the importance of being able to support the use of new and innovative technologies, and we remain committed to moving forward with the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023.

The noble Baroness, Lady Grender, and the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, mentioned pesticides. We are aware of concerns, and we have been absolutely clear with the EU on the need to agree appropriate transition arrangements.

On future legislative changes, we intend to take powers through the European partnership Bill, which will be laid shortly after the signing of the agreement to fulfil the treaty obligations in the agreements with the EU, which will enable the domestic implementation of relevant commitments. I assure noble Lords that Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise these powers and their associated scrutiny mechanisms once the Bill is introduced.

The noble Lords, Lord Frost and Lord Roborough, and others, said that the Government's figures are misleading. We previously published modelling that estimated the agreement could increase UK GDP by up to 0.14% annually in the long run—equivalent to £5.1 billion a year. That figure is the Government's upper estimate of the long-run annual increase in UK GDP from the SPS agreement, compared with the scenario of no agreement. The year 2040 is used as the "long run" to reflect the economy once all the shorter-run transitions have been worked through, which is typically assumed to take around 10 to 15 years following the agreement, based on established economic modelling and the best available evidence. Of course, this cannot be a precise forecast but rather an assessment, and we will continue to assess as we go forward.

The noble Lord, Lord Frost, asked about costs. We will assess the impact as part of the normal regulatory process, which will be developed alongside the secondary legislation required for the agreement.

The noble Lords, Lord Verdirame and Lord Roborough, asked a number of quite complex questions around the CPTPP and other areas. I am going to run out of time. As the topics are quite detailed, I will write to the noble Lord, Lord Verdirame, and ensure that other noble Lords who have taken part are copied in. In the last five seconds, I thank everybody for taking part in this important debate. I look forward to future debates on the EU partnership agreement.