

Agri-Brexit Coalition Meeting

The Farmers Club
Committee Road
3 Whitehall Court
London
SW1A 2EL

4 September 2019

Attendees

Robert Sheasby	(AIC)	Ruth Bailey	(AEA)
Jeremy Moody	(CAAV)	Adam Speed	(CPA)
Katie Doherty	(IMTA)	Duncan Russell	(NAAC)
Grace O’Gorman	(NOAH)		

Apologies

Penny Maplestone (BSPB)

Guests

Robin Manning	(DEFRA)	Paul Rooke	(AIC)
Chris Kearney	(DEFRA)	Geoff Dodgson	(AIC)
Zach Sauven	(DEFRA)	Stephen Haworth	(AEA)
Terry Boniface	(BEIS)		

1. Introductions

RS welcomed participants and reminded Coalition members that the offer to invite Chairman or Board Members stood, but to inform Julia Corr ahead of meetings.

2. Matters Arising

RM has provided a list on backstop numbers which JC will circulate.

Action: JC

RS has invited George Eustice to a future meeting. RS to copy the invitation to RM.

Action: RS

RS asked all to put forward ideas for future meetings.

Action: ALL

3. BEIS presentation

Terri Boniface, Assistant Director, Manufacturing Team.

TB operates in fields of electronics and machinery(E&M) which has a negative trade balance. His team engages regularly with AEA and its European counterpart.

E&M involves extensive EU trade and is dominated by large businesses such as Siemens and Bosch. Much of their work is done with the trade association alliance EURIS which helps with getting information to industry, but GDPR issues are a constraint.

Tariffs are not a significant issue in most of E&M, apart from automotive and aerospace. Borders do not pose a significant issue as there are well established supply chains

Correct paperwork is seen as most critical issue to avoid border delays and back-ups.

EU marking remains an issue and not just for supply of products, but also to handle arrangements on servicing, as companies having supplied a machine then need parts and labour

to cross borders for service and repair. This is a significant issue as 20% of value of supplying a machine can be in service and repair. In such instances, data transfer is an issue. This even affects HR matters for an EU resident mechanic servicing equipment in UK post-Brexit.

Outreach to the industry is a critical issue for BEIS and there is some feeling that EU businesses are not taking the threat of no deal sufficiently seriously.

AEA confirmed issues that apply not just to importing EU-made equipment, but also exporting second hand products. In the latter case, older machines may not be compliant with EU regs any more.

Other issues raised were 'Groupage' where one small part of a consignment could cause difficulties for the whole load. If just one supplier has incorrect paperwork, 10s or even 100s of others on same load could suffer delay. Particular challenges will be availability of HGVs and storage capacity.

4. DEFRA update

a. Borders

Gordon Friend spoke on his work which focuses on borders on the 'narrow straits'. (Dover-Calais and Channel Tunnel). The primary concern is ensuring food flows into the country and keeps flowing.

Supply chains are circular and therefore any delay on either side of the Channel will cause problems to build up across the supply chain.

It is likely that potential problems from an October exit will be less as the French appear to be more prepared than they were in March.

Correct documentation will be critical. France has done considerable work on clearance and a traffic light system will be introduced. Vehicles with a green light will pass with minimal hindrance; whereas 'amber' will face delays. Most agricultural and food products will be classed as 'amber'.

UK government is working hard on 'trader readiness'. 'Pop-up' sites will give hauliers and drivers advice on what paperwork is necessary. 'Border readiness' checks will be operated in Kent, so that inadequate documentation will be stopped and remedied away from the ports. *[Post meeting note: Some 1500 pop-up sites have been announced for both UK and overseas locations]*

Most places in Northern France have parking spaces for 500-1000 trucks. Therefore, there is a buffer capacity. It remains to be seen if the level of checking is reduced if parks get full.

For Irish hauliers, transiting the UK as a land bridge, then the UK will have no interest in terms of customs, duty, etc. Also, important to note that many drivers involved will be nationals of other EU countries.

IMTA raised issue of vets and their availability. Defra has created 'Certifying Officers' to ease workload on vets.

The issue of groupage was raised again, pointing out that for a retailer with many product lines, one consignment could need up to 100 certificates. There was a plea for

SMEs to be involved in groupage discussions. But these discussions are not being led by Defra.

There was a consensus among Coalition members that they would appreciate transparency on the dialogues going on within those looking at borders and the delivery group.

There was some discussion on phytosanitary certificates and the increased workload. Also, the issue of some parts of the supply chain seeking certificates unnecessarily, eg grain trading. Defra want to know of such instances and will seek to ensure needless requests are not made.

The challenges of being able to use TSPs if seeking to export goods within a TRQ were raised, particularly where the TRQ was operated on a first-come, first served basis.
RM agreed to come back on this issue.

The wider picture of other ports and airports was raised. Some modelling work is being done on flows through ports other than those on the narrow straits. There are no plans for border ready checks at other ports. There may be activity by port owners. Heathrow is well-established for third country trade.

The location of Border Inspection Posts will be published by government.

b. Defra other matters

No deal planning remains a priority and there will be no scaling back of activity. Considerable focus on the 'well-being' of sectors within the agricultural sector, eg a debate on sheep was held in the House of Commons on 3 September.

RM will seek an opportunity for George Eustice to meet with the Coalition. This may require a separate meeting date.

Tariffs are subject of further work. The effects of tariffs on sector health will be monitored and adjustments made if necessary. Coalition members who come across anomalies are to feed in to RM.

Enquiries are being raised by MPs on issues such as seed and plant protection products.

The possibility of purdah, should a general election be called was raised. This will need specific advice for civil servants.

5. Coalition – the way forward

It may be timely to re-introduce a new programme of seminars and workshops. Need to consider what type of event and what topics to prioritise.

ALL to feed in ideas before next meeting

It was agreed that work continues to develop the AgriSupply Coalition for launch. This would be based on a refreshed version of the Agri-Brexit Coalition one pager. There was consensus that the key issues remained, but the words needed revising.

RS/ PR/ GD to revise and share

Experience was shared on the BEIS funding available to help deliver Brexit information. For most the deadlines were too short and the amount involved was too high. NOAH is bidding, based on using specialist contractors to deliver much of the output. AEA considering a bid, and would be willing to work with other Coalition partners. However, most agreed issues too diverse to work well together.

For the next meeting it was agreed to add to the agenda the National Food Strategy and to invite someone to talk on the Irish Border issue, James Cruddas was suggested

National Food strategy to be added to October meeting agenda

The meeting ended at 12.45