

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS  
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet  
dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for  
Climate Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref – PO/HIDCC/0270/25

Andrew RT Davies MS  
Chair  
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee  
Senedd Cymru  
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1 July 2025

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 June. I can confirm that you are correct in your observations that, in the context of ongoing negotiations on a UK-EU SPS agreement, there will be a need to consider the future implementation of the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM), and we will also need to minimise any further divergence from the EU.

This work is already underway: the Committee may have noted, for example, that Defra and the devolved governments have announced that checks on fruit and vegetable imports will not be introduced, in anticipation of an agreement with the EU.

Whilst any future UK/EU SPS agreement is likely to roll back BTOM rules in respect of imports from the EU, there is still a need to review biosecurity and food safety measures for areas that may endure within such an agreement. This work and the ongoing negotiations with the EU will determine the need for further trade controls during the remainder of the sixth Senedd. Once a timetable is in place I will be happy to provide you with an update.

I anticipate significant legislative changes being required, but the full detail will not be clear until agreement is reached. Nevertheless, it is important officials in both UK and Welsh Governments begin to consider how to make any required changes. Good co-ordination will be essential, and there will be resource implications, bearing in mind the significant workload that comparable Brexit changes caused in terms of SPS regulations.

I have provided a response to your remaining questions below:

***To what extent, if any, the Common Understanding agreement requires a change of approach to the BTOM's implementation, including changes to the timetable mentioned above:***

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

It is important to note that the existing requirements continue to apply until any agreement is finalised and implemented.

It is likely that the BTOM will be rolled back in respect of SPS imports from the EU, however, the Common Understanding agreement itself does not change the BTOM directly but rather suggests a pragmatic approach to its implementation, to minimise nugatory expenditure, liability and further divergence from EU rules which would need to be re-aligned following any agreement with the EU.

As timescales for negotiations and subsequent implementation become clearer, we will be able to determine appropriate biosecurity and food safety arrangements for the interim. I am committed to ensuring an acceptable level of biosecurity protection.

***How the governments are working together on the change in approach, if any, required by the Common Understanding agreement:***

The UK Government has stated its intention to work collaboratively with the devolved governments in preparation for negotiations with the EU. Ministers and officials are engaged through established intergovernmental mechanisms, including the Interministerial Group for EU Relations, the EFRA Interministerial Group and the Interministerial Group for Trade and we have supplemented this with specific quadrilateral discussions on the implications for the BTOM. This cooperation is vital to ensure that negotiating positions reflect Welsh interests and devolved competences, particularly in the areas of public and animal health.

At an official level there is a formal EU Exit Group that meets to discuss the SPS agreement. Officials also meet Defra officials weekly on a more informal basis to discuss progress and engagement between governments of the UK.

***What implications there are, if any, for the readiness of Border Control Posts currently under construction:***

You will be aware that Holyhead Border Control Post (BCP) is very near completion, so the Common Understanding does not alter its construction programme, but I am keeping the implications for our readiness preparations under review. I covered this in my recent statement to the Senedd and will be happy to discuss this further when I appear before the Committee on 17 July. However, until we have final details of any SPS agreement, it will be impossible to be definitive about our future need for BCPs, so we will need to keep this under review.

### ***The Welsh Government's view on the SPS provisions in the Common Understanding:***

The EU is our most important agri-food export market by sales value so I welcome measures that reduce friction for agrifood movements and safeguard trade. It will also remove the complexities for imports into Wales brought about by the distinction between, and different treatment of, Irish or EU goods and Northern Ireland Qualifying Goods when there is no transparent way to identify the latter.

Wales has a strong interest in upholding high sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, both for public health and trade continuity. I will continue to work with the UK Government on how the SPS provisions in the Common Understanding will be negotiated, especially in areas falling within devolved competency.

We support the removal of barriers to trade but must continue to guard against disease and ensure we have measures in place which provide an acceptable level of biosecurity protection. All GB Chief Veterinary Officers and Chief Plant Health Officers are in agreement that the pest and disease risk within Europe has increased since we left the EU. There is a rising tide of notifiable animal disease outbreaks in Europe, including Foot and Mouth Disease, African swine fever (ASF), peste des petits ruminants (PPR) and the spread of plant pests such as Xylella. Canine rabies remains endemic in a number of EU countries.

I remain committed to ensuring that any changes arising from the Common Understanding are managed in a way that protects biosecurity and public health, upholds devolved competence, safeguards Welsh economic interests, and supports an efficient and operable border framework.

### ***The Welsh Government's view on the specific provisions requiring the Great Britain to dynamically align to EU SPS standards***

We support the UK Government in seeking an SPS agreement with the EU, on behalf of the whole of the United Kingdom.

However, given the devolved nature of sanitary and phytosanitary matters, collaboration between the UK Government and devolved governments will be crucial and our support is contingent on meaningful engagement in planning, negotiating and implementing an agreement.

We have always anticipated that any agreement would likely need to be based on some form of dynamic alignment. In principle we support that model, subject to other provisions that still need to be secured in future negotiations, for example around specific exemptions to the agreement and access to EU systems and databases.

I and my colleagues have consistently supported closer alignment with EU SPS standards, viewing it as a practical step to maintain seamless trade in critical sectors and minimise regulatory divergence.

***The Welsh Government's initial analysis of the Common Understanding in relation to movements between Wales and the island of Ireland, including NI-Ireland-Wales movements and vice versa***

Until we have a final agreement, we cannot confirm the requirements for movements between Wales and the island of Ireland. Nevertheless, we anticipate significantly fewer checks being required. Provided biosecurity is maintained, any simplification of checks on imports from the island of Ireland, plus improved clarity on movements of NI goods through Ireland and into Great Britain, will benefit Wales, and particularly the Port of Holyhead.

I look forward to discussing this further on 17 July.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping loops and strokes, positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

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