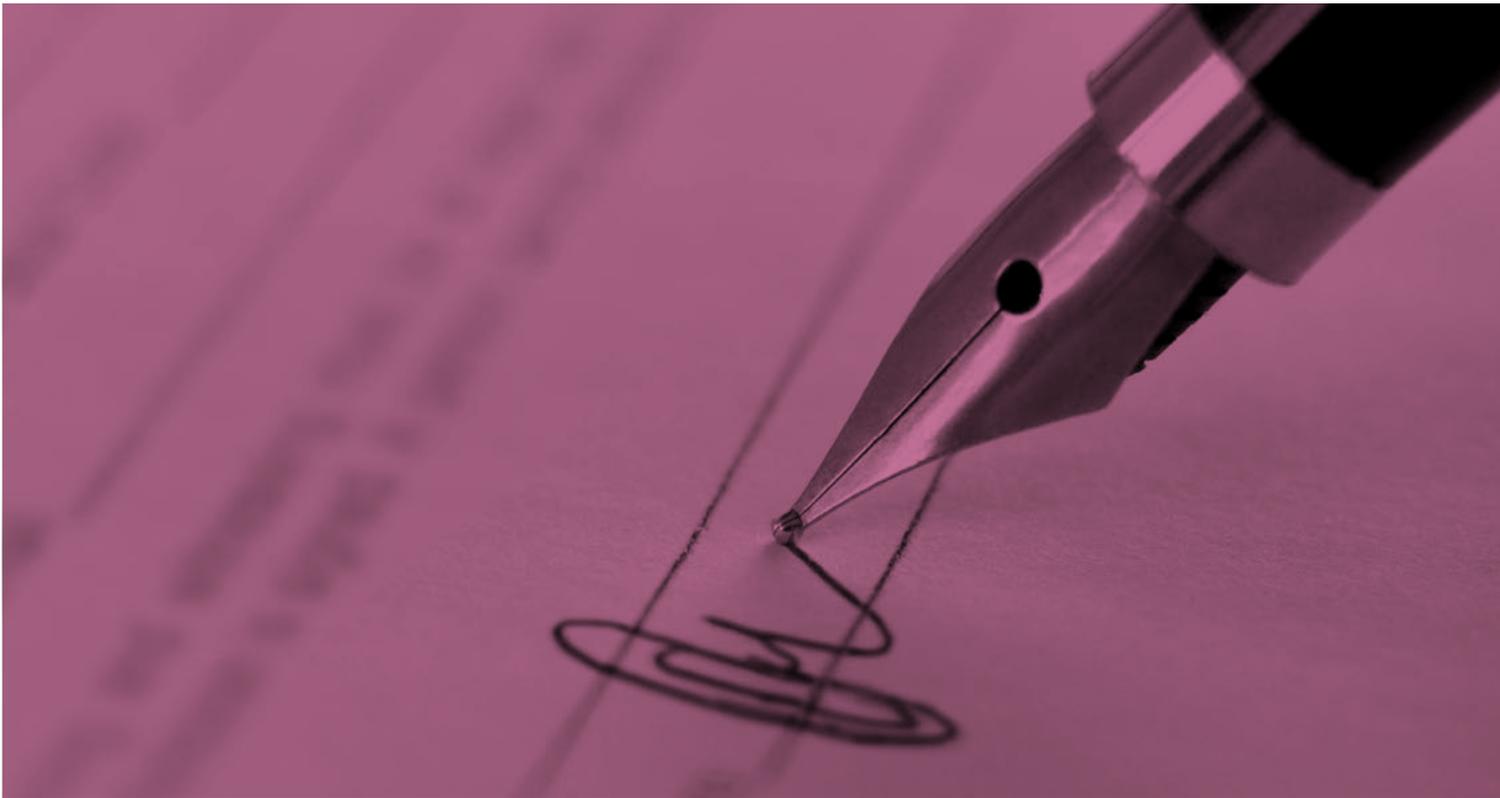


Trade Bill – Committee Stage, House of Lords

Parliamentary briefing · October 2020



Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

CIEH is the professional voice for environmental health representing over 7,000 members working in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Building on its rich heritage, CIEH ensures the highest standards of professional competence in its members, in the belief that through environmental health action people's health can be improved.

Environmental health has an important and unique contribution to make to improving public health and reducing health inequalities. CIEH campaigns to ensure that government policy addresses the needs of communities and business in achieving and maintaining improvements to our environment and our health.

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Key points

- The Trade Bill provides the legislative framework for post-Brexit UK trade policy. But future trade agreements could have significant implications for public health, food safety and standards, the environment, and workers' rights, so it is vital they are subject to sufficient scrutiny. We are concerned that the Bill does not include provisions to protect UK food standards, to ensure that trade agreements are subject to independent impact assessments, or to provide Parliament with powers to scrutinise and vote on trade deals
- The UK's high food standards must not be undermined in future trade agreements. Negotiating away British food standards could have severe consequences for the environment, animal welfare, and public health, whilst undercutting British farmers. To ensure UK standards are not compromised, CIEH urges peers to support amendments that would require all imported food products to be subject to the same high food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards as domestic products
- New trade deals could have significant negative impacts on public health, food safety, animal welfare, the environment, and workers' rights. We believe these potential impacts must be assessed and considered before any new trade agreements are ratified. CIEH urges peers to support amendments to require all trade deals to be subject to an independent risk assessment
- We are concerned that the Trade Bill provides the Government with powers to amend primary legislation to implement trade agreements without proper parliamentary scrutiny. To ensure transparency and democratic accountability, CIEH urges peers to support amendments to the Bill that give Parliament powers to scrutinise and approve trade deals

* Based on the findings of a survey of 86 Environmental Health Practitioners, carried out in July 2020.

Protecting Food Standards

Future trade deals could undermine UK food standards unless domestic standards are protected in law. For example, the US has made its determination for the UK to accept US agricultural products that run counter to UK food standards very clear. In its negotiating objectives for a free trade agreement with the UK, the US is explicit that it wants to "remove expeditiously unwarranted barriers that block the export of US food and agricultural products". "Without sufficient legal protections, a trade deal with the US could open the door to products like chlorinated chicken, hormone-treated beef and additional harmful pesticides that are currently illegal in the UK.

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) are uniquely well placed to comment on the risks of lowering standards because they work at the heart of our country's food system, ensuring the safety, standards, and quality, of the food that we produce and consume. Our research shows that EHPs are deeply concerned about the impacts of lowering food standards on public health*:



98% – told us they would be concerned about additional pesticides being consumed by the public



94% – told us they would be concerned about chlorinated chicken being consumed by the public



93% – told us they would be concerned about hormone-treated beef being consumed by the public



82% – told us they would be concerned about the public consuming these products due impacts on public health

Pesticides

Allowing food products of lower standards to be imported into the UK risks exposing consumers to a whole host of dangerous pesticides that are currently illegal in Britain. For instance, the US approves the use of 9000 pesticide products compared to the 2900 approved for use in the UK.² For example, chlorpyrifos has been banned in the EU after scientists determined that no safe exposure levels could be set due to “possible genotoxic effects as well as neurological effects during development”.³ Several studies have shown linkages between exposure to chlorpyrifos and low IQ and delayed mental and motor skill development in young children.^{4,5}

Beef Hormones

Six artificial beef growth hormones are banned in the EU but are approved for use in the US. In 1999, the EU Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures Relating to Public Health reported that the use of synthetic hormones pose potential risks to human health.⁶ In light of the available evidence, the committee concluded that no safe threshold levels can be established for any of the six hormones used in the US. These hormones are most frequently used in high-intensity beef production systems called “freedlots”. “Freedlots” are associated with several animal welfare problems, including muddy conditions, poor cattle handling and heat stress.⁷

Chlorinated chicken

Chlorine washed chicken has been banned in the EU since 1997, and there are widespread concerns that chlorine washing can mask lower standards of animal welfare and hygiene standards in production, slaughter and processing. Moreover, a 2018 study from the University of Southampton found that chlorine washing was not totally effective in eliminating the bacteria that cause food poisoning in leaf vegetables.⁸ Rather, the process merely blocked the standard method by which the presence of these bacteria should be revealed.

Antibiotic resistance

Overuse of antibiotics in farm animals is contributing to the rising threat of antibacterial resistance, presenting a major risk to public health. But future trade deals could expose the UK to considerably higher levels of antibiotics in farming. For example, in the US total antibiotic use in farm animals is five times higher than in UK and in cows, it is eight to nine times higher.⁹

Labelling

Clear labelling of food is a cornerstone of the UK’s current public health strategy. Healthy eating rests on supporting people to make informed, healthy choices, enabled by using food labelling to avoid foods high in sugar, salt, and fat. But future trade deals risk undermining the progress the UK has made in this area. For example, the US considers nutritional labelling to be a “barrier to trade” and argues that compliance with the UK’s traffic light labelling schemes should be voluntary.¹⁰

What are we calling for?

Protection of domestic standards

Threats to food standards posed by new trade deals could be averted if protections for the UK's existing high standards are enshrined in law. CIEH urges peers to support amendments that would require all imported food products to be subject to the same high food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards as domestic products.

Impact assessment

All trade agreements should be subject to an independent impact assessment. We support the recommendation in Part One of the National Food Strategy for the Government to adopt a statutory responsibility to publish a report on any proposed trade agreements.¹¹ An independent body should assess and report on the impact of any new trade agreement on food safety, public health, animal welfare, the environment and climate change, human rights and workers' rights.

Parliamentary approval of trade negotiations and agreements

When the UK was an EU Member State, new trade treaties were subject to extensive scrutiny by the elected European Parliament. However, the Trade Bill does not transfer powers to scrutinise and ratify trade deals to the UK Parliament, weakening democratic accountability. CIEH urges peers to support amendments to the Bill that give Parliament powers to scrutinise and approve trade deals.

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