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Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Convener, Rural Affairs & Island Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

20 August 2025

Dear Convener,

Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) Implementation Update

I am writing to make the Committee aware of an announcement by the UK Government about a pause of further implementation of the UK Border Target Operating Model. You may be aware of a Government Initiated Question on this matter.

In May 2025, the UK Government announced a Common Understanding with the EU with a view to negotiating a 'Common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Area'. It could, if agreed, exempt many imports of live animals and other goods from SPS border checks – something the Scottish Government has long advocated for. As a result of this negotiation, Ministers from all four nations have agreed to pause the further implementation of the BTOM at this time.

The UK Government issued a press release to outline this policy change on 18 August 2025 to ensure traders are aware that the current inspection regime will remain in place until a new SPS agreement is negotiated and implemented with the EU.

My agreement to the pause was subject to a commitment from the UK Government that all four governments will review the effectiveness of the existing biosecurity protections whilst the SPS Agreement negotiations progress and until an agreement is reached. In addition, UK Government committed to engaging collaboratively with Devolved Governments during the SPS negotiations with the EU. In the meantime, officials across four nations are working on measures to tackle avoidance and illicit trade and balance Scotland's trade and biosecurity interests.

Yours sincerely,

JIM FAIRLIE

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