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Tariffs axed immediately on Australian beef and lamb, triggering fears that farmers will be sent ‘to the wall’

Small print – revealed by Canberra, but suppressed in London – reveals pledge to protect farmers for 15 years has been dropped

Rob Merrick Deputy Political Editor | @Rob_Merrick | 20 hours ago | 453 comments




UK-Australia trade deal will benefit British farmers, Boris Johnson insists



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triggering accusations that the trade deal struck by **Boris Johnson** will send UK farmers “to the wall”.

The small print of the first major post-**Brexit** agreement – revealed by Canberra, as **the UK government tried to keep it under wraps** – revealed **a pledge to protect farmers for 15 years** has been dropped.

Instead, Australian farmers will effectively be handed tariff-free access from day one, up to a “cap” on sales that is 60 times the current level of imported beef. 

The detail was revealed as experts warned the overall economic boost from the deal would be “close to zero” – and the government admitted the average household would be just £1.20 a year better off.

The **National Farmers Union** demanded ministers come clean on exactly what has been agreed, “to ensure our high standards of production are not undermined by the terms of this deal”.

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And **Emily Thornberry**, Labour’s shadow trade secretary, said: “No other country in the world would accept such a terrible deal for its farming industry, and neither should we.

“With this deal, and the precedent it sets for New Zealand, America, Canada and Brazil, the government will send thousands of farmers to the wall, undermining our standards of animal welfare and environmental protection, and threaten the 

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Neil Parish, the Conservative chair of the Commons environment committee, said that “would make a mockery of the commitments made”, when a watchdog was promised last year.

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The prime minister, shaking hands in Downing Street with **Scott Morrison**, his Australian counterpart, insisted it was “a good deal that will benefit British farmers and British consumers as well”.



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It contained “the strongest possible provisions for animal welfare”, the prime minister argued, telling journalists: “We had to negotiate very hard.”

However, when the deal was mooted last month, it was anticipated that tariffs and quotas would not be fully removed on meat imports for 15 years – to calm the



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tonnes – more than 60 times the level of sales to the UK in 2020.

* Tariffs will only be levied on imports of lamb above 25,000 tonnes – around three times last year’s sales.

Currently, Australian beef exporters pay a 12 per cent tariff, with variable surcharges of between £1.40 and £2.50 a kilo, and face an annual quota of 3,761 tonnes.

Labour also argued the UK would leap immediately from the 27th to the 6th most popular destination for Australian beef, if the full quota was taken up, and to third place for lamb.

Tariff-free beef imports will be allowed to reach 110,000 tonnes by the tenth year and sheep meat imports 75,000 tonnes.

“While Australia is getting everything it wanted and more, we are getting next to nothing in return, with a miniscule 0.025 per cent increase in UK growth the most optimistic projection,” Ms Thornberry added.

Trade experts backed that verdict on the economic benefits of the deal, John Ferguson, at the Economist Intelligence Unit, calling it “incredibly small”.

“This is simply due to the fact that Australia is a long way away from the UK and distance really matters to the amount that two countries trade with each other,” he said.

Dr Peter Holmes, of the UK Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex, said: “The total direct net effect of the trade deal will be close to zero, so the key questions are what provisions it makes for standards and what precedents it sets.”

The UK government said the “agreement in principle”, to be published in the coming days, would:

* Eliminate tariffs on all UK goods going to Australia – although they are typically only around 5 per cent.



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* Scrap export tariffs for car manufacturing, Scotch whisky, confectionery, biscuits and ceramics.

Downing Street has been asked to confirm the tariff-free deal for beef and lamb imports and respond to the criticism that farmers have been let down.

Liz Truss, the trade secretary, admitted to a “zero-tariff quota that increases over time”, but argued there were safeguards to prevent “import surges”.

She also said MPs would eventually be able to oppose the deal, although there will be no specific vote, but there would be no detailed scrutiny until after it has been agreed in full, which is not expected to happen until the autumn

Angus MacNeil, chair of the Commons international trade committee, condemned the delay, saying: “The trade negotiation team must come to a public hearing of the committee.

“This is too important for a ‘pig in a poke’ deal – we don’t want the UK to agree to something that hasn’t been scrutinised.”

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