



26<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
By Email

Dear Secretary of State

Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) – Cold Chain Federation (CCF) Concerns

I am writing to express our concern regarding the proposed Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) and its potential negative impact on our sector and the UK consumer. We believe the current model poses significant challenges to the efficient and safe movement of temperature-controlled plants and products of animal origin, potentially jeopardising vital supply chains and impacting food and bio security at a critical time.

As you know, the cold chain – a network of temperature-controlled logistics firms spanning farms, warehouses, transportation, and retail – plays an essential role in ensuring the safe, fresh, and accessible delivery of food, plants, and medicine across the nation. Our industry, valued at over £8.5 billion and projected to reach £12.5 billion by 2028, is a critical pillar of the food and pharmaceutical system and the broader national economy.

Our concerns fall into the following broad areas:

- Groupage
- Readiness of EU businesses and support infrastructure
- UK testing facilities and biosecurity
- April 2024 changes to the process

**Groupage**

Many of my member companies operate a 'groupage' model, often with a commitment to 4-hour response times. This is challenging but achievable. This 'just-in-time' approach has supported EU food imports for many years, ensuring fresh and wide varieties of food and plants that will now be classed in the BTOM 'medium risk' group and fall into the 24-hour pre-notification process. This



remains a challenging scenario when modern and highly efficient logistics processes are subject to the new BTOM notification process.

Countries that have been identified as being particularly vulnerable are France and Netherlands where goods are loaded less than 24-hours before transport or on a weekend. In particular, short shelf-life food, fresh produce such as fish and plant materials that require temperature-controlled transportation will be highly susceptible to the enforcement of the 24-hour ruling.

Groupage operates through mixed loads at multiple temperatures from multiple suppliers with pick up points throughout Europe. With the 30th of April deadline looming it remains unclear whether the government is able to factor in to its plans current cold chain operating models.

One 'live' example shows a medium risk supplier placing an order with a UK haulage and warehouse firm at 9am UK time in the Netherlands. It is packed, picked up and travels to the UK by ferry, leaving Rotterdam at 14.30, arriving in Felixstowe at 22.00.

Consignments arriving in Dover etc operate on an even tighter turnaround time.

The 24-hour rule will not be workable for the thousands of consignments that this example represents and if this consignment is chosen for inspection, it cannot be processed in time for the Border Control Post (BCP) closing time of midnight.

We note with concern that no standard service level exists for BCPs and that none will operate 24/7.

We welcome the 'trusted trader pilot' that goes some way to supporting groupage operations but have yet to see a wider more permanent roll out and adoption of this model.

We welcome the commitment by the management of the Sevington site that all checks will be completed in a 90-minute time target. But we have concerns about the viability of fresh produce should this target be exceeded. The target does not appear to consider waiting time for inspection or time spent travelling to the (BCP).

Many vehicles operate multi-temperature consignments from plants that require 14C transport facilities, through to products of animal origin being stored at 3/4C and -18C. We have yet to receive any assurances that BCP's such as the Sevington site can assure both bio safety and product quality by isolating consignments at the correct temperatures for minimum inspection and wait times.

#### **Ask of UK Government:**

To clarify how it anticipates supporting UK cold chain haulage and storage businesses to continue to operate safe and timely deliveries of EU goods into the UK.



In particular, what are the details of the 24-hour support proposed by government to support CCF member companies and its drivers to work with the new regulations and how will the 24-hour notification be enforced?

The 24-hour rule can be derogated to four hours upon application, but the process and responsibility remain unclear. The CCF asks government for urgent clarification of this point.

### **Readiness of EU businesses and support infrastructure**

All consignments in medium to high-risk groups will require an Export Health Certificate and be subject to the pre-notification process.

It is a requirement that all goods falling within these categories will have an export health certificate issued by a veterinary practitioner per consignment. Since the phase one roll-out we are seeing many consignments being administratively rejected because the consignment is being signed off by an unqualified signature. We remain concerned that there is a lack of qualified veterinary officers and that the requirements of sign off are still unclear to importing producers and countries.

With the introduction of Export Health Certificates, inspections and a consignment charge we believe that this will deter many food producers in the EU from choosing to export to the UK, particularly small, artisan producers, whilst at the same time adding between £700 and £1,000 to the cost of one multi-consignment lorry entering the UK with medium risk produce.

### **Ask of UK Government:**

To clarify what consignment charges will apply and how the issuing of Export Health Certificates will continue to support round the clock haulage operations so that food supplies into the UK are not disrupted.

Which body will be billing all of the additional charges out in this process? And in particular who will bill the common user charge?

### **UK testing facilities and bio security**

Another area which is of real concern to us is bio security once medium and high-risk goods have reached UK soil.

A new inspection site is to operate in Sevington, which is 22 miles inland, reached via the A20 and M20. Dover Health Port Authority (DHPA) estimate that at least 3,500 consignments of produce per month will need to be verified as safe and therefore subject to inspection. The CCF challenge this figure, knowing that at least one major import transport firm process' 1000 per week, which includes documentary to full inspections.



By definition, this means that potentially unsafe and contaminated food will be able to travel 22 miles inland before being secured. We are also aware from DHPA figures that five tonnes of dangerous and illegal meat were intercepted in just one month leading up to Christmas 2023.

This clearly demonstrates a determination for criminals to import high value, but potentially dangerous meat products into the UK and the 22-mile corridor now open to them (or indeed, other criminals to intercept high value goods) adds further risk to the UK food chain in that it provides numerous routes to exit from the inspection process.

We also remain concerned that the DHPA budget is being reduced by over 70% and that medium/high risk goods entering Dover will have only one check point: that being Sevington.

Whilst we accept that the Sevington site must be given time to become fully operational, there is merit in further investing in and expanding the 'trusted trader pilot' to allow medium risk goods to be fully secured during transit and warehousing by allowing proven operators to operate their own secure inland control points.

I have just visited the Port of Felixstowe to see a £multi-million, brand new BCP, which is mothballed and has no staff allocated to it. With just two months before the 30<sup>th</sup> of April deadline, I and the CCF remain deeply concerned about the readiness of BCP facilities.

#### **Ask of Government:**

To work with experts from the CCF and its membership to urgently facilitate discussions on how the 'trusted trader' scheme can expand to support the intentions and smooth operation of BTOM.

The CCF notes that the government has embarked on a 'journey assurance' pilot. We welcome this and ask government to work with the CCF and its members to advance this work rapidly in order to support the wider aims of BTOM.

To urgently review the readiness of all proposed BCP facilities.

#### **Consequences of BTOM from April 2024.**

This letter summarises the added cost and administration and delay to the importation of medium risk food produce. But this remains particularly critical to the chilled food sector where both safety and quality are paramount to the UK consumer.

Understandably, UK food retailers insist on the highest standards of both welfare and food security before it can be accepted by them. Even a 24-hour delay in the system described above may result in rejection of that load/consignment.

The cost and environmental impact of this added wastage will invariably find its way to the UK consumer. Add to this, consignment charges, added administration, health certificate costs and the



cost of vehicles and drivers when checks and delays are factored in, and it is inevitable that food inflation will result.

The UK consumer and retailers will also suffer from a lack of choice as smaller EU producers decide that importing to the UK is no longer administratively and financially viable.

The cold chain logistics operators are ready to adapt to the live BTOM roll-out on the 30th of April. But we remain concerned that EU administrations, producers and UK government inspections are not.

When 2021 UK Exports rules came into force many smaller cold chain UK warehouse and distributors found the administration to onerous and ceased to operate. With BTOM going live in April 2024 the effect on both European partners and UK firms may be similar.

Clarification on the issues identified in this letter and further consultation with the cold chain warehouse and distribution network will alleviate many of the issues highlighted.

We await your response and look forward to working with you to resolve issues leading up to and beyond the 30th of April deadline.

Phil Pluck  
CEO  
Cold Chain Federation