

# Labour bids to block removal of steel safeguards on cheap imports

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Labour MPs will try to kill off the threat of more cheap steel imports entering Britain in a Commons debate and vote later today.

Anger and disappointment at a recommendation from the Trade Remedies Authority to drop almost half of the safeguards put in place to protect domestic production has led to an attempt at urgent action in Westminster.

Leading figures will use today's Opposition Day to make government legislate to allow ministers to overrule the TRA without losing all protections – as could happen should it be allowed to run its course.

It sits on International Trade Secretary Liz Truss's desk, with current powers to expire on June 30.

They were brought in by the EU after US tariffs were imposed to head off Chinese imports that could have been diverted, but expire every three years.

As the UK opted to drop nine of the 19 categories, Brussels renewed all for a further three years – making Britain more of a dumping target in the eyes of industry.

Under the banner 'Protecting Britain's steel industry' led by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and key figures from his shadow team – Angela Rayner (deputy leader), Emily Thornberry (Shadow International Trade Secretary) and Ed Miliband (Shadow Business Secretary), as well as chief whip Sir Alan Campbell and Shadow Leader of the House, Thangam Debbonaire – they will put forward: “That this House believes the British steel industry, and the livelihoods and communities it supports, should not be undermined by unfair competition from overseas; regrets that the Trade Remedies Authority has not accounted for the interconnectedness of the British steel industry, nor the impact of safeguard tariffs being maintained in the US and EU, when recommending the abolition of nine of the 19 existing safeguards on steel products; accordingly requires the Government to take urgent action by legislating to allow ministers to reject the Trade Remedies Authority's recommendation and temporarily extend the current safeguards”.

It calls for it to be given precedence in the House next Monday “to make provision for urgent legislative action to protect the vital interests of the British steel industry”.



Former Business Secretary Alok Sharma, left, and Scunthorpe MP Holly Mumby-Croft, during the visit to the British Steel works in Scunthorpe. Mr Sharma has been succeeded by Kwasi Kwarteng since.

(Image: Scunthorpe Live)

Ms Thornberry said: " This Government is on the verge of selling out Britain's steel industry. Slashing safeguards and opening the floodgates to cheap steel imports would be devastating for steel plants across our country and damaging for our wider economy.

"Any MP who represents a steel community should vote for this motion. Any MP who cares about the UK's economy, our industries, our critical infrastructure, our national security, and protecting the tens of thousands of jobs that depend on steel should vote for this motion.

"The Tories have already betrayed British farmers this month

and now they are preparing to do the same to British steelworkers. We cannot let that happen.”

The Australian trade deal, alluded to, has been welcomed by British Steel as it has traded in railway sleepers for the last seven years – with a 5 per cent tariff scrapped.

Scunthorpe’s Conservative MP Holly Mumby-Croft has also put in to speak today. The chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Steel, she wouldn’t be drawn on her voting intention ahead of the debate, stating: “I’m going to listen to everything that gets said and what the Minister says – I remain extremely concerned about this.”

[As reported last week](#), she has expressed her disappointment to the Department for International Trade that the compelling arguments put forward by industry have not been heeded by the TRA.

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Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic have shown the pace at which legislation can be amended, with many in the industry hoping to see just that.

Potential for mills to close as a result has been expressed, with [British Steel strongly objecting to the recommendations](#).

UK Steel director-general Gareth Stace said: “Plans to slash the UK’s steel safeguards in half are reckless and irresponsible.

“Steel is a foundation industry, fundamental to our economy and our national security.

“By removing half of the steel safeguards, the Trade Remedies Authority and Government will expose the entirety of the sector to floods of imports and damage the case for investment in steel facilities across the country.”

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Fears for naval ship building have also been aired.

A Government spokesperson said: "All interested parties, including importers, domestic producers and overseas exporters, have been able to participate in the review to provide evidence to factor into the Trade Remedies Authority's assessment.

"The TRA is a non-departmental public body, and all its decisions are based on a thorough analysis of the evidence.

"The Trade Secretary's decision on the recommendation will be published before the measure is due to expire on June 30,

2021.”