

Post-Brexit border check delays have lead to huge uncertainty says leading Hull port health figure

Hull's chief port health inspector says the government's decision to further delay the introduction of post-Brexit border checks on EU food imports has created "huge uncertainty" over the issue.

The move announced in April by Brexit Opportunities minister Jacob Rees-Mogg was the [fourth time in just over two years](#) that a proposed starting date for inspections on food and animal products had been put on hold. The latest target date is now late 2023.

Physical inspections on meat imports were meant to start in July with checks on dairy products due to be introduced in September and checks on all remaining imported UE food, including fish, due to start from November. Before Brexit, no border checks were needed on such items because the UK was part of the EU's frictionless trading regime across member state borders.

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On the Humber, the ports of Hull, Immingham and Killingholme handle nearly 150 million kilos of imported food from the EU every year. A total of [£47 million has been spent on new border control posts at the ports](#) in readiness for use next month.

In a new report for the Hull and Goole Port Health Authority chief inspector Laurence Dettman said the latest delay had

been greeted with “great disappointment and incredulity” across the shipping sector. He added: “The latest major change in policy has left port health authorities and other agencies, which strived to meet the complex demands for ‘UK Border Readiness within extremely tight deadlines unclear as to how best now to proceed.



Hull and Goole Port Health Authority chief inspector Laurence Dettman.

(Image: Reach Plc)

“The present position remains one of much confusion, with a distinct lack of clarity of both immediate and future purpose. While Defra have announced that there will be a ‘Target Operating Model’ published in the Autumn of 2023, with the implementation of any new checking regime delayed until the end of 2023, there are grave doubts as to how UK port health authorities may fit into the new checking regime and very importantly, how such duties would be resourced.”

Mr Dettman said he had been able to cancel a recruitment drive at short notice following the announcement. Twenty new jobs

were in the process of being advertised at the authority to meet its expected increased workload at Hull, Immingham and Killingholme.

He added: "I am in close liaison with Defra, and they have been left in no doubt that the first priority is to protect the authority from any financial risks associated with staff and other resources, such as expensive IT systems, already in place. While the short-term financial risks have been avoided, I will continue to press for urgent clarity relating to any forthcoming future role for the authority in the EU food import checks at our ports.

"The minister's announcement has also caused shock and consternation for port operators who now have very extensive and expensive, fully-equipped new border control posts at their ports. When or whether these facilities will now be used is uncertain.

"Fortunately, the authority has no financial liabilities relating to these facilities and I am in no position to comment on how such problems will be resolved but I do empathise with the unenviable situation that ports now find themselves in, with unused facilities now mothballed indefinitely."

Hull's Spencer Group won major contracts to build out the facilities, with the region's seafood processing cluster having campaigned for better inspection facilities for a decade, with many species handled originating from outside the UK.

Speaking in April, Mr Rees-Mogg said the latest delays were necessary because of rising costs caused by the war in Ukraine and increasing energy prices having a negative impact on existing supply chain issues. He added: "New administrative burdens, and the risk of disruption to ports and supply chains would compound this situation for the public."

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