

Brexit import checks delayed again to spare squeezed firms a further cost hit

The government is delaying post-Brexit checks on EU imports again, saying it would be wrong to risk fresh disruption during the cost of living crisis.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, the minister for [Brexit](#) opportunities, said checks due to come into force from July would now no longer be introduced this year – and claimed this would save British firms £1bn in annual costs.

Instead, he said the government will target the end of 2023 as the revised introduction date for a new controls regime “which will deliver on our promise to create the world’s best border on our shores”.

It means that post-Brexit checks on European goods will not be fully in force until nearly four years after the UK formally left the European Union at the end of January 2020.

Britain’s relationship with the EU then entered a transition period which ended at the start of 2021 when a new free trade deal, agreed at the last minute, came into force.

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But while that deal relieves the threat of tariffs, businesses have complained about the red tape and costs that have been imposed on them – and that the introduction of full UK checks on imports of goods from Europe have been [repeatedly delayed](#).

Firms had been preparing for border checks on some products from the EU to start to be introduced from July, though recent reports suggested these would be pushed back again.

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They would have included prohibitions and restrictions on the import of chilled meats from the EU, safety and security declarations, and changes to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS)

checks on plant and animal products.

Mr Rees-Mogg said in a written ministerial statement on Thursday that firms could now stop their preparations ahead of July.

“British businesses and people going about their daily lives are being hit by rising costs caused by Russia’s war in Ukraine and in energy prices,” he said.

“It would therefore be wrong to impose new administrative burdens and risk disruption at ports and to supply chains at this point.

“The remaining import controls on EU goods will no longer be introduced this year – saving British businesses up to £1bn in annual costs.”

He said that the government would instead accelerate a “transformative programme to digitise Britain’s borders, harnessing new technologies and data to reduce friction and costs for businesses and consumers”.

Mr Rees-Mogg said introducing new controls this summer “would have introduced complex and costly checks that would have then been altered later as our transformation programme is delivered”.

Instead, plans for a new regime of border import controls will be published in the autumn.

Controls introduced in January 2021 on the highest risk imports of animals, animal products, plants and plant products will continue to apply.

UK businesses exporting to Europe already face [border red tape](#).

Labour MP Hilary Benn, chair of the UK trade and business commission – a group of MPs and business representatives –

said: "Today's announcement is an admission by ministers that introducing their new customs controls would hamstring our economy and worsen the cost of living crisis by artificially making trade more expensive for businesses and consumers.

"Meanwhile British businesses trying to export to the EU will continue to face costs, delays and red tape which the same ministers have imposed on them."