

# **French border closed to UK freight – Scotland ‘ready to help’**

**There was a meeting today of SGoRR, the Scottish Government’s emergency resilience committee this afternoon.**

This followed a COBR meeting earlier. SGoRR discussed the closure of the French border to UK freight.

The Prime Minister said at a briefing today: “I want to update everyone on one thing and that’s what’s happening at our borders and especially at Dover. Last night at 11pm the French Government imposed restrictions on UK freight crossing to France when accompanied by a driver.

“And so today I chaired a meeting of the Government’s emergency, COBR committee in order to co-ordinate a UK-wide response.

“And it is vital first to stress that these delays– which are only occurring at Dover – only affect human-handled freight, and that is only 20 per cent of the total arriving from or departing to the European continent, which means the vast majority of food, medicines and other supplies are coming and going as normal.

“You may also be aware – in fact I’d be amazed if you weren’t – that the government has been preparing for a long time for this exactly kind of event.

“So working with the Kent Resilience Forum, Kent County Council and Highways England, we’ve activated our long-prepared plans, with the result that we have already been able to reduce the number of lorries waiting on the M20 from 500 to 170. The site at Manston Airfield is ready to cope with any overflow. And, of course, we are working with our friends across the Channel to unblock the flow of trade as fast as possible.

“The Government at all levels is communicating with our friends in Paris.”

After the meeting, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: “We are closely engaged with the UK Government, pressing them to find an urgent solution and get the Channel ports open again. That is the overriding priority.

“What is reassuring is that Scotland is well stocked with food and medical supplies. We are in close communication with the NHS and with food retailers and there is no issue that causes concern for the immediate few days ahead. We will be monitoring this position closely – particularly as we move into the post-Christmas period.

“What absolutely is an immediate concern is the impact on exporters, not least of perishable goods such as seafood. This is their most critical time of year and right now, their products are trapped miles from their markets. That has to be urgently resolved.

“We have raised the question of financial support for those hit by this action with the UK. We stand ready to help in any practical way we can as this situation develops and will keep all actions under active review.”

Unaccompanied freight or containers are unaffected.

The Road Haulage Association (RHA) have issued an update too. The trade organisation has urged shoppers not to panic buy after the French Government closed the border with the UK last

night. RHA Chief Executive, Richard Burnett said that retailers have brought in more ambient stock than usual for the time of year amid long-standing industry concerns about border delays after transition.

He said: "The Christmas supply chain is resilient and our industry is very good at making sure we've got all the goods we need as we've shown throughout the pandemic.

"So we urge people not to panic buy which could spark unnecessary shortages in January when some goods could already be harder to come by."

He raised concerns about British exports getting across the border this week and what facilities are available to lorry drivers stuck in queues in Kent.

"Truckers typically have low Covid-19 infection rates given the nature of their jobs and minimal contact they have with others so it doesn't make sense that they can't cross the border into France."

We're reassured that UK ministers are making every effort to resolve this issue with their French counterparts as quickly as possible, he added.