

Claims of Irish Sea Border Removal Misleading as Trade Checks Persist and Expand

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Despite repeated assertions from political figures suggesting the Irish Sea border has been removed, evidence indicates that border arrangements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland remain in place and, in some cases, are becoming more embedded. Ongoing checks

and regulatory controls continue to impact the movement of goods, directly contradicting claims of a dismantled or non-existent trade frontier.

Under the Windsor Framework, an agreement jointly announced by the United Kingdom and the European Union to amend the previous Northern Ireland Protocol, trade arrangements between Northern Ireland and Great Britain were intended to be simplified. While the framework introduced a “green lane” system designed to ease checks for goods staying within the UK, businesses have confirmed that practical changes on the ground remain limited. Goods travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland remain subject to customs declarations and, in many instances, compliance checks under EU Single Market rules.

Recent reports and interviews with logistics experts and traders reveal that the supposed easing of trade barriers is not as extensive as initially advertised. A key component of the Windsor Framework is the division between goods intended solely for Northern Ireland (using the green lane) and those that may enter the Republic of Ireland (and therefore the wider EU), which must follow stricter “red lane” procedures. This two-tiered system means checks have not been removed; they have been restructured. Full implementation of the framework has not yet taken place, with further customs and sanitary measures scheduled for enforcement from October 2024.

A former senior official involved in the post-Brexit negotiations, speaking to the BBC, described the claim that the Irish Sea border was removed as “nonsense,” citing the persistence of regulatory barriers. Industry groups, particularly in the agri-food and logistics sectors, have echoed these concerns, noting the continued administrative burden placed on trade.

The Irish Sea border was first established under the Northern Ireland Protocol following the UK’s departure from the European Union. It aimed to avoid a hard land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by instead placing checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. While politically contentious, these arrangements were necessary to preserve the integrity of the EU Single Market while upholding the terms of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

Despite political commitments by some in Westminster to remove the trade border entirely, the legal and operational structures supporting these checks remain in effect. Critics argue that public statements downplaying the existence of the border risk misleading voters and undermining trust in the political process. Meanwhile, business leaders continue to call for

greater clarity and stability in post-Brexit trade policy to minimise disruption and maintain competitiveness.

As full enforcement of the Windsor Framework nears, the Irish Sea border continues to play a defining role in UK-EU trade relations. Claims of its removal remain inconsistent with both official policy and the experiences of those working within the supply chain.