Alister Jack DL MP
Member of Parliament for Dumfries and Galloway

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Dear Constituent

When I was elected as your Member of Parliament in June 2017 I was under no illusion that the decision to leave the European Union, and the ongoing negotiations at that point, would command most of the parliamentary timetable and dominate my inbox. On an issue of such constitutional, economic, social and political importance, people are rightly concerned about the impact it will have on their jobs, livelihoods, families and communities. Please accept my apologies for the lateness of this letter, however Brexit is a fast-moving subject and by waiting until the recess this letter is as up-to-date as possible.

Over the last 18 months I have had many individual conversations and received hundreds of emails, letters and phone calls from constituents on a wide range of issues relating to Brexit. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has taken the time to contact me and whether we agreed or disagreed, I fully respect and value your views and opinions.

On Sunday 25th November at the European Council meeting in Brussels, the Prime Minister reached a deal with the Leaders of the 27 other EU member states on the Withdrawal Agreement and a Political Declaration on the Future Partnership between the UK and the European Union. This was no small feat and is testament to the resolve, stoicism and resilience of Theresa May, and I fully commend her efforts on successfully reaching this stage, often against the odds.

This is not a perfect deal – no deal ever is – but I believe it is the best deal possible and as someone who voted leave in 2016, a deal I can accept. This deal delivers on the referendum result at the same time as reflecting the narrow margin of victory for leave, protects jobs and our economy, and allows us to enjoy the benefits of no longer being a member of the EU.

As a result of this deal EU citizens' rights are guaranteed and protected, as are the rights of British people residing in EU countries. Securing agreement on this was of vital importance to those who have decided to live in our country and contribute so much to our society.

Agriculture is a bedrock of our local economy here in Dumfries and Galloway. Leaving the EU gives us the chance to design and implement a support system focussed on the needs of UK farmers as well as the jobs and communities that they support. Obviously this is a devolved policy area and it is for the Scottish Government to follow the UK Government's lead by bringing forward their proposals. My colleagues and I have been in regular discussions with NFUS throughout this process and I will continue to back this very important industry.

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After the implementation period the UK is free to strike trade deals around the world and this will provide great exporting opportunities to businesses here in Dumfries and Galloway, and across the country. The IMF has projected that around 90% of world growth is likely to come from outside the EU and as we retake our seat as an independent nation at the World Trade Organisation the UK has a unique opportunity to realise the benefits of negotiating trade relationships with new countries.

In 2014 the people of Scotland overwhelmingly decided to remain part of the UK. Throughout these negotiations my colleagues and I have been absolutely clear that we will not support a deal that does anything to undermine the integrity of the United Kingdom. Following the publication of the deal I sought assurances on this and am confident that this deal protects our precious Union.

In doing so I am reassured that if the UK enters the backstop arrangement, the UK will be treated as a single customs territory and there will not be a border down the Irish Sea, which I could not accept. I am also pleased that nothing in the Protocol on Northern Ireland undermines the UK single market and ensures that businesses in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy the same unfettered access to the UK internal market.

The deal also recognises the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, which is the only part of the UK to share a land border with an EU Member State, commits to avoiding any hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and upholds the Good Friday Agreement.

When the deal was published concerns were expressed about the UK's ability to exit the backstop agreement and I share these concerns. The Withdrawal Agreement makes clear the arrangement would be temporary and I am further reassured by the words of the Attorney General who has confirmed that Article 50 is not a sound legal foundation for permanent arrangement between states. The UK also has the option to request an extension to the implementation period, so I am confident that the UK cannot be kept in the backstop in perpetuity which would not be in the interests of either the UK or the EU. After listening to MPs concerns the Prime Minister is currently engaging with other EU leaders to seek further reassurances that the backstop, if used, will only be temporary and I hope she will be successful in securing these concessions in the next few weeks.

In a letter from the Prime Minister I was also pleased to receive a commitment that after 46 years of membership of the Common Fisheries Policy, the UK will once again become an independent coastal state. This will allow us to decide who fishes in our waters and move away from the present arrangements where 60% of the fish in UK waters is caught by EU Member States under common access. If an agreement is reached between the UK and the EU the Government have also committed, through the Fisheries Bill currently going through Parliament, to annual negotiations on access and quota shares and to ensuring that domestic fishermen receive more favourable quota shares than they would have had had we remained in the EU.

Many constituents have also asked my position on the subject of a second referendum. On the 23rd June 2016 the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in a referendum that saw a higher turnout than any UK-wide vote for more than 20 years. That result must be

respected, even if it was unexpected by some, and the UK will leave the European Union on 29 March 2019. Both main political parties also pledged in their manifestos at the 2017 General Election to respect the referendum result and these parties received over 80% of the vote. As you are aware, in 2014 the people of Scotland voted to remain in the United Kingdom. Just as I do not support a second EU referendum I do not support a second referendum on the issue of Scottish independence. We cannot play best of three, five or even seven with the results of democratic referendums.

In conclusion, this deal is the only deal on the table and I will be supporting it when it comes back to the House of Commons the week commencing 14th January 2019. Despite the rhetoric there is no other deal more favourable than this one, and a no-deal outcome would create damaging uncertainty. This deal is the right one for jobs and our economy by protecting integrated supply chains and maintaining free and frictionless trade, but is also one that will make the Scottish Parliament even more powerful by returning important powers over policy areas such as agriculture and our environment.

As the negotiations progress to the next phase I will continue to stand up for the interests of the people of Dumfries and Galloway and support the Prime Minister to deliver a Brexit that works for the whole of the UK.

May I also take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a happy and peaceful New Year.

Yours sincerely

Alister Jack DL MP
Dumfries and Galloway constituency