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By Luisa Cheshire

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PML predicts chaos ahead

Comment: UK is heading towards chaos if government doesn't act to solve supply chain crisis, writes Mike Parr, MD of logistics firm PML



Mike Parr, MD of PML Logistics

Morrison's, Marks & Spencer and The Food & Drink Federation have all publicly commented on the serious supply chain crisis which is threatening the nation. As a leading industry player and provider of world class logistics and supply chain solutions, PML forecast the current scenario and its dire consequences almost 12 months ago.

We are facing these issues on a daily basis.

The HGV driver shortage is paralysing the industry. More needs to be done to support the wellbeing of these important individuals who represent the lifeline to maintaining essential food & drink as well as medical supplies to the UK.

Logistics firms are being hammered with a new 'driver retention fee' in addition to the traditional sea freight container charges, which can be as much as £150 per container. This kind of

exploitation is only adding to what is already a difficult situation and forcing firms to review their charges to the end customer to allow for these demands.

The government has supposedly prepared importers of perishables so that they are capable of undertaking the complicated paperwork associated with customs clearance post Brexit. It is bordering on ignorance to assume that anyone can navigate their way through the system with no previous experience of this specialist sector. It takes years of training for an import clerk to be up to speed with the detailed and ever changing requirements imposed by DEFRA – including not just the stringent import regulations but also the approval required to collect goods from a transit shed - yet the inference is, that this is just a 'basic job' that anyone can turn their hand to. Pointing importers to the government website to help them understand the requirements is just not going to cut it.

I'm afraid I don't concur with the Prime Minister's recent assurance that there is no impending crisis regarding food supplies. Sadly, I predict quite the opposite and envisage that by January 2022 nothing short of chaos will reign. The reality is that our industry is more affected by the pandemic now than we were last year, due to the 'pingdemic'; the growing number of Covid cases requiring personnel to isolate for 10 days and the reluctance of many of our European drivers to be vaccinated.

Combine the HGV driver shortage, the customs clearance issues and the impact of the pandemic and it is plain to see that the country is destined to be facing some very challenging conditions. Surely the government should have seen some of this coming and prepared for these problems? The approach taken by the powers that be seems to be very much reactive rather than proactive – if I ran my business in this way, we would have gone bust.

The latest news is that Britain is poised to delay additional post-Brexit customs checks due to come into force on 1st October, for the second time amid concerns they could fuel further disruption in the run-up to Christmas.

The fact is, there should be a long-term strategy in place to deal with all of these concerns. Not just for Christmas but in the years ahead ...

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