

## Ireland would be 'screwed' if UK crashes out of EU, exports chief warns

Simon McKeever says companies in Ireland are totally unprepared for hard Brexit

Ireland would be "screwed" in the event of a no-deal [Brexit](#), which is now more likely than at any other time, the head of the [Irish Exporters Association](#) (IEA) has warned.

Simon McKeever dismissed speculation in the currency markets and elsewhere that the risk of the UK crashing out of the EU without a deal had diminished.

"We need to be very careful in reading too much into the movement [of sterling] over the last couple of days," he said during a panel discussion on Brexit at the [National](#) Manufacturing and Supply Chain Conference in Dublin.

Mr McKeever, a former currency trader himself, said the movement in sterling since Theresa May's failure to win parliamentary support for her Brexit deal had been minimal and nothing like the original post-vote slump. "The market is unable to make a decision on whether there is going to be a crash out or a remain at this point," he said.

"Most of the people in the trading rooms are very heavy gamblers and when you look at the betting than was done before the vote in June 2016...they all got it wrong big time," he said. Mr McKeever said most companies in Ireland were totally unprepared for Brexit. "I don't think as a country we are ready for this. I think if it happens, to put it bluntly, we're screwed."

He said the number of customs declarations to get goods on and off the island of Ireland will jump from 1.7 million to 50 million in the case of a hard Brexit. The equivalent hike in the UK is expected to be from 50 million to 200 million.

"So we're going to be five times more impacted than the UK from a paperwork point of view," he said. "Think of the impact that's going to have on companies from a resourcing point of view, from a skills set point of view."

### Exposure

At the same event, [Michael Bell](#), chief executive of the [Northern Ireland](#) Food and [Drink Association](#), spoke of the food industry's exposure to Brexit.

He said [World Trade Organisation](#) (WTO) tariffs, which would apply in the case of a no-deal Brexit, were designed to stop the movement of agri-food products. "They're not designed to facilitate trade in food," he said, noting they range from about 15 per cent to 60 per cent and average at about 22 per cent. This would effectively price many Irish food products out of the UK market, he said. Ireland's agri-food industry has long been seen as the most vulnerable sector to Brexit because of its reliance on the UK.

Mr Bell said Brexit had also exposed the complexity of manufacturing supply chains with some products produced in Northern Ireland crossing the Border five times during the manufacturing process.

This would lead to problem when it came to the country of origin rules, he said. Mr Bell said Northern Ireland had seen a 25 per cent reduction in incoming migrants since Brexit was announced.