

Minister backs Airbus Brexit remarks and dares May to sack him

Business minister Richard Harrington praises firm for calling handling of EU exit a 'disgrace'

[Lisa O'Carroll](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Thu 24 Jan 2019 14.21 GMT



Richard Harrington said he was very happy if the PM decided he was not the right person for his job. Photograph: Chris McAndrew/UK Parliament

The business minister Richard Harrington has dared the prime minister to sack him after he praised Airbus for branding the government's handling of Brexit a "disgrace".

Speaking at a German Industry UK gathering in London, Harrington said: "I was delighted to read Airbus's comments this morning because it is telling it like it is," adding that a no-deal Brexit would be "a total disaster for the economy".

The Airbus chief executive, Tom Enders, said on Thursday morning: "Please don't listen to the Brexiteers' madness which asserts that 'because we have huge plants here we will not move and we will always be here'. They are wrong."

The company manufactures aircraft wings in the UK and employs 14,000 people in the country. Enders added: "It is a disgrace that, more than two years after the result of the 2016 referendum, businesses are still unable to plan properly for the future."

Harrington welcomed the comments, saying of a no-deal Brexit: "I really don't believe in this idea. I am very happy to be public about it and very happy if the prime minister decides I am not the right person to do the business industry job."

Harrington had previously warned that he would be willing to resign rather than be part of a government that pursued a policy of leaving the EU without a deal.

But his exasperation appears to have increased after Theresa May's keenly awaited statement on Monday contained few fresh proposals for averting a no-deal Brexit.

"This is a disaster for business and business needs to know where it is and that doesn't mean, 'oh great, two weeks before we are leaving, now we can rule out crashing out'," he said.

May has continued to insist that the only way to avoid Britain leaving the EU on 29 March without a deal in place is to support her deal. And she remains focused on renegotiating the backstop in a bid to win over her own backbenchers, rather than seeking a cross-party consensus.

Several cabinet ministers, including the justice secretary, David Gauke, and the work and pensions secretary, Amber Rudd, have suggested they would rather resign than support a no-deal Brexit.

He also said Brexiters needed to stop clinging to the WTO as a liferaft as if it was a club, not a regulatory body.

"I know in business we want one thing and that is certainty. The fact that we can rely on WTO as a way of conducting ourselves ... there are no WTO rules. This is one of the fictions and fallacies. It provides a platform and a membership to negotiate individual agreements," he said.