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The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural
Affairs

Defra
Nobel House
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21 April 2017

Dear Andrea,

Defra and Devolved Administration Ministers' Meeting

Following the meeting of the Ministerial group on 20 April, I would like to bring forward concerns about the agenda and priorities of these meetings.

As my Ministerial colleague Fergus Ewing discussed at the meeting, we are deeply concerned at the lack of attention being paid to the environment in these Ministerial meetings, given the substantial work that will be required as a result of an exit from the EU. A healthy natural environment is critical to Scotland's economy, our health, our landscape and our way of life. We have been able to develop and maintain our high standards because the EU has created arrangements for trade between partner nations that respect and promote progress in social and environmental protection. It is of the utmost importance that these protections are upheld. I was very concerned to see press reports suggesting that the UK would scale down climate change and wildlife measures in order to prioritise trade following Brexit.

Yet, while there are some important matters of principle that we should be considering, the agenda seems largely to be taken up with procedural updates. The environment working group is developing its work, however this must be given strong direction and focus by the Ministerial group. Looking ahead, we need to make full use of the opportunity of Ministerial meetings, and make it an urgent priority that substantial issues for the future of environmental policy are discussed early in this inter-administration process. It is also important that there is an opportunity to consider how Brexit will affect the important links between environment and climate change policies, although I appreciate that only some parts of this fall under Defra's remit.

To support this work, we need all departments to be open with information, including on the identification of substantial policy options. I thought that this had been accepted by all administrations at the meeting on the 23 February. For example, there are significant areas of EU regulation that impact on both reserved and devolved areas. Areas such as chemicals



regulation may require the development of new operational frameworks, depending on the outcome of negotiations and Scotland and the UK's future relationship with the EU. It is important that you share information so that we can jointly consider developing policy options at an early stage.

I would like your personal commitment to ensuring that environment policies are given the full attention they deserve during this process. If it is not possible to resolve this adequately through the existing series of Defra and devolved administrations Ministerial meetings, then I would ask you to consider a separate mechanism. However, if we focus the meetings on those key strategic matters that need Ministerial consideration, it may be possible to accommodate these important issues within the existing sequence of meetings.

I am copying this letter to Thérèse Coffey MP, Lesley Griffiths AM, Mike Russell MSP and to Noel Lavery, Permanent Secretary for the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland Executive.

Yours,



ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM