

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands
Mairi Gougeon MSP
Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and
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Lorna Slater MSP



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12 May 2022

Dear Dean,

INTER-MINISTERIAL GROUP FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (IMG EFRA) MEETING

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs meeting held on 21 March 2022.

The meeting was hosted by UK Government via video conference with George Eustice MP, Secretary of State, acting as chair. Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands and Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity represented the Scottish Government.

The main items of discussion were issues stemming from the war in Ukraine, Defra's Nature Green Paper, Common Frameworks, Preparations for Border Controls and Single Use Plastics.

The group noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in May. A read out of the meeting and summary of attendance is included in the attached communiqué and has been published on the Scottish Government website.

We hope this summary is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

MAIRI GOUGEON

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LORNA SLATER

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Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) Communique: 21 March 2022

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) met on Monday 21 March by video conference.

The meeting was chaired by George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The attending ministers were:

- from the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Victoria Prentis MP, Minister of State for Farming, Fisheries and Food; David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; Conor Burns MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland.
- from the Scottish Government: Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands; Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy, and Biodiversity.
- from the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd.
- from the Northern Ireland Executive: Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The meeting opened with a discussion on key issues arising within the EFRA sectors from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. All ministers strongly condemned the unprovoked and unjustified attack, which is causing suffering and loss of life. The ministers discussed the impact of the war on global supply chains and commodity prices, and potential ways to help mitigate these impacts. Ministers highlighted their continued engagement with industry, which is vital for understanding the specific issues affecting the businesses on the ground, such as fertiliser prices and the challenges facing the freight and transport sector. Supply chain issues relating to the situation with P&O Ferries was also discussed. Ministers also recognised the need to ensure effective and timely data, which would allow administrations to quickly identify and react to emerging issues wherever possible.

The Group then discussed the UK Government's recently published Nature Green Paper for England, which aims to support the ambition to restore nature and halt species decline. Key aspects of the paper include a coherent framework for protected sites and delivery arrangements.

The next item discussed was the EFRA Common Frameworks programme. Officials informed Ministers that all but two of the provisional common frameworks have now been published with scrutiny currently underway in all of the legislatures, and this is expected to last into the autumn. It was agreed that these published versions would be used by officials while the documents are being scrutinised.

Ministers then discussed preparations for the next phase of border controls which are due to come into force from 1 July 2022.

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The last substantive item of the discussion was on single use plastics. Defra's Secretary of State confirmed that the UK Government's position was for a narrow exclusion from the UK Internal Market Act covering bans on the supply of single use plastic straws, stirrers, cotton buds, plates, cutlery, balloon sticks and expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers. While Scottish and Welsh Ministers welcomed that an exclusion had finally been agreed, they were clear that their preference remained for a much broader exclusion to align with devolution and to avoid needing to revisit the process in the near future for further bans on single use plastic. They also repeated concerns about the impact of the UK Internal Market Act on future policy developments.

Finally, Ministers also discussed joint working between Defra and the devolved administrations on the role of improved data and how this could support tackling health, environment, and animal welfare challenges within the food system. Ministers also discussed aquaculture, the need for clarity on VAT implications for Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme, the Royal Welsh Show and the UK Agriculture Partnership.

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