26th May 2015

Dear Rob,

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 11 MAY 2015

I am writing to provide you with a report on the outcomes of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting which I attended in Brussels on 11 May.

As you will have seen I called for EU Member States to state their commitment to ambitious and swift simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy. Whilst I recognise that other Member States had divergent views it is disappointing that the agreed Council Conclusions fall short of my own ambitions. I intend to continue to encourage the European Commission to further reduce complexity ahead of their expected proposals in the Autumn.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for information.

Richard Lochhead

RICHARD LOCHHEAD
AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL REPORT: 11 MAY 2015

SUMMARY

Ministers agreed Council Conclusions on CAP Simplification and generally voiced support to Slovenia’s initiative to create a World Bee Day. Council also continued negotiations to seek an agreed position on a revised Regulation on Organic Production and Labelling of Organic Products, this was not achieved on Monday and work will be ongoing.

KEY OUTCOMES

Organic Production and Labelling of Organic Products

1. The Council sought to negotiate a general approach on the revised Regulation but remained blocked on a few key issues including the frequency of controls and the handling of the presence of non-authorised substances. The Presidency will therefore continue working group level negotiations with a view to reaching a compromise by the June Council.

CAP Simplification

2. Ministers welcomed the agreed Council Conclusions on Simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy. These were less ambitious than some Member States, including Scotland and the UK, would have liked to have seen. They nevertheless do set a tone for continued discussion of the priorities in the short, medium and longer term ahead of the anticipated announcement of the Commissioner’s own roadmap in the autumn. At this Council the Commissioner also announced several changes to the guidance, which he believes will make a difference to simplifying the implementation of greening requirements in the short term, and reiterated his commitment to a review of Greening rules in 2016.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

World Bee Day

3. Slovenia received near unanimous support from other Ministers for their suggestion to propose the setting of a World Bee Day through the United Nations. The UK supported this suggestion, underlining that all countries of the UK have pollinator strategies and encouraging people to visit the hive-design UK Pavilion at the Milan Expo.

Pig Welfare Conference

4. Denmark reported on a recent pig welfare conference that they held and called on the Commission to amend the Pig Welfare Directive, particularly with regard to tail docking and surgical castration.

Rural Development Expenditure
5. Bulgaria requested that the Commission extend the deadline for eligibility of payments under the 2007-2013 rural development programmes for six months, to mid-2016. Some other Member States supported this and the Commissioner responded that his services were still considering this request and would provide more shortly.

6. The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be held in Luxembourg on the 16 June 2015.