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Dear Gillian

DEFRA AND DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS MINISTERIAL MEETING

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the Defra and Devolved Administrations Ministerial meeting held in London on 5 July 2018.

For the Scottish Government, the meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretaries for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform and the Rural Economy and the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment. Other attendees included Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (in the chair); and Lesley Griffiths AM, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by officials.

The main items discussed were an update from the June European Council, Domestic Preparedness, SI Planning, Updates on Agriculture and Fisheries Bills and Future Funding Arrangements.

Mr Ewing noted that the devolved administrations had been given sight of the Fisheries White Paper only two days before the meeting and had not been meaningfully engaged in its development despite Scotland's pre-eminent position in UK fisheries.

He observed that the White Paper raised a number of concerns on which the Scottish Government sought reassurance, including: respect for the devolved nature of fisheries; the feasibility and environmental sustainability of some of the White Paper's technical proposals;

clarity on the future of vital EU marine funding streams; and other EU exit challenges such as potential trade barriers and availability of EU labour.

Ms Cunningham noted papers prepared by Defra on domestic preparedness and on its Statutory Instrument programme.

Mr Ewing gave details of Stability and Simplicity, the Scottish Government consultation informed by the work of the Agricultural Champions, proposing a 5-year rural funding transition period, to provide some certainty for businesses' investment decisions.

Mr Ewing asked for Defra's Agriculture Bill to be shared with devolved administrations in draft as soon as possible and asked if the red meat levy would be within the scope of the Bill. He noted that this Bill might provide a legislative vehicle deliver the UK government's stated aim of preventing a flood of cheap imports produced under lower standards. Mr Ewing stressed that agriculture is a devolved issue and drew attention to the overall Scottish Government position on the issue of legislative consent as a result of the UK government's handling of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill/Act.

Mr Ewing also pressed for the review of CAP convergence funding, which Mr Gove had already agreed should take place, to begin as soon as possible.

The next meeting is to be held in London on 17 September 2018.

We hope this summary is helpful. A letter to the Convenor of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in similar terms has also been issued.

Yours

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