05 October 2020

Dear Edward

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 14 September 2020.

The meeting was hosted by the Welsh Government via video conference with Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs as chair. Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Rural Affairs represented the Scottish Government.

The main items of discussion were the proposed UK Government Border Arrangements and the Northern Ireland Protocol, Secondary Legislation, Common Frameworks, and Transition Period preparations and readiness.

The group noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in October. 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. A letter to the Convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in similar terms has also been sent.

Yours sincerely

FERGUS EWING

MAIRI GOUGEON
Communiqué
Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)
14 September 2020

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 14 September by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The attending ministers were:

From the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Defra, Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defra, David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; and David Duguid MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland.

From the Scottish Government: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism; and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Rural Affairs.

From the Northern Ireland Executive: Edwin Poots, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The chair welcomed Ministers to the meeting.

The Group discussed the levels of border checks which would take place from 2021 and agreed there should be a pragmatic risk-based approach which fully aligns with Ministers’ domestic and international legislative obligations. While seeking further detail and clarity on how the proposed Border Operating Model would work in practice, Ministers reaffirmed their wish to ensure unfettered access for goods originating from Northern Ireland to GB whilst ensuring other goods transiting Northern Ireland to GB were subject to the appropriate controls.

Ministers then explored the operational challenges presented by the Northern Ireland Protocol in ensuring unfettered access for Northern Irish goods entering the GB market. Northern Ireland and Scotland Ministers both raised issues linked to dealing with mixed consignments, infrastructure, and funding in order to ensure that the appropriate Border systems are fully operational by the end of the Transition Period. The Welsh Government also highlighted the fact the Protocol is not route specific, so raises challenges relating to indirect trade routes and their impact on competition.

The Group discussed the UK Government’s Internal Market Bill where Scottish and Welsh Ministers stressed their deep and underlying concerns and continued opposition to the bill. This centred on the Bill, as drafted, breaking international law and undermining existing devolved settlements. Both administrations stressed their strong belief that Common Frameworks remain the most appropriate mechanism for managing potential future divergence and stressed their continued commitment to that programme.

The Group reviewed and agreed the work plan for frameworks, discussed plans for secondary legislation for the remainder of the year, and considered preparedness and business readiness for the end of the transition period. Scottish and Welsh Ministers raised concerns about business preparedness and called for more detail and cooperation in responding to the challenge of supporting businesses to prepare. Ministers agreed to work
jointly to improve preparedness. Finally, Ministers recognised the potential impact of Covid on the UK’s readiness for the end of the Transition Period.