24 April 2019

Dear Edward,

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

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs held in London on 25 March 2019.

For the Scottish Government, the meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment. Other attendees were: Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK Government; Robert Goodwill MP, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, UK Government; Lesley Griffiths AM, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government; Dr Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland Executive; Lord Duncan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland, UK Government; and Nigel Adams MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales, UK Government.

The main items discussed were: EU Negotiations; Contingency Planning, Emergency response arrangements and Domestic Preparedness ; Legislation, and Funding.

On EU negotiations, we reiterated the points made by the First Minister, in her letter to the Prime Minister, about the role of Devolved Administrations in the negotiations and apparent UK Government concessions to one political party, the DUP.
In relation to No Deal planning, we set out concerns about the potential impact on key sectors, in particular sheepmeat and seafood. We discussed broader issues surrounding food security and trade and we sought assurances about the funding of No Deal readiness work by the UK Government, including additional costs associated with additional export certification and processes around animal health and welfare. We also discussed our emergency response preparations and the need to provide accurate information to stakeholders and businesses, particularly SMEs.

The discussion on legislation included brief updates on the Agriculture and Fisheries Bills. On the Environment Bill, there was discussion about the possible content of the Bill and how it might interact with devolution.

On funding, we reiterated our repeated call for clarity from HMT on what is included within the definition of ‘farm support’ for the purposes of the UK Government’s funding commitments. We also raised the concern that Defra have not yet confirmed that the intra-UK allocations review panel will have access to all previous papers and advice relating to the 2014 and 2020 allocation of convergence funding.

In accordance with the new Terms of Reference, IMG members agreed to issue a joint communiqué on administration webpages (copy attached). This has been published on the Scottish Government website.

The next meeting is to be held on 29 April in Cardiff. Other proposed dates for 2019 are: 20 May (London); 24 June (Belfast – if Ministers have been appointed); 16 September (London); 28 October (Edinburgh); and 25 November (London).

We hope this summary is helpful. A letter to the Convenor of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in similar terms has also been issued.

FERGUS EWING

MAIRI GOUGEON
The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) met on Monday at 2 Marsham Street in London. The meeting was chaired by Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK government:

- the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
- the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Robert Goodwill MP
- the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland, Lord Duncan
- the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales Nigel Adams MP

From the Welsh Government: The Minister for Energy, Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM

From the Scottish Government:

- the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing MSP
- the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon, MSP

The Permanent Secretary at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Denis McMahon attended the meeting in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive.

The Chair opened the meeting by providing an update on the UK’s exit from the EU. The group discussed recent developments and implications for the Withdrawal Agreement and future negotiations.

Discussions focused on the potential impacts of a no-deal outcome, noting these would be damaging and were highly undesirable. It would mean key sectors would come under significant stress and disruption. The group considered the funding and other support needs which would arise and that devolved administrations did not have financial allocations to meet such needs without further UK government provision. Ministers wanted to ensure the wellbeing and welfare of individuals in affected sectors was appropriately addressed.

The Group also discussed business preparedness and communications and updates on secondary and primary legislation.