18 July 2018

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 Defra and Devolved Administrations Inter-Ministerial Group meeting held in London and via video conference from Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast on 24 June 2019.

For the Scottish Government, the meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham MSP; Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing MSP, and the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon MSP. Other attendees were Robert Goodwill MP, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, UK Government (chair); Lord Duncan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland; Kevin Foster, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales and Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by officials.

The main items discussed were: Future Work Programme; Domestic readiness preparations; Primary and Secondary Legislation, including Agriculture Bill implications, and Funding.

On the Future Work Programme, we stressed that the time between now and October should be used to enhance engagement on no deal projects. We raised concerns over the mixed levels of information sharing and joint working taking place and stressed the importance of increasing the pace of joint working, given the time constraints.
In relation to domestic readiness preparations, we raised concerns about the perceived lack of activity within UK Government on preparations for no deal, particularly given the additional risks posed by an October exit.

In relation to Export Health Certifications (EHCs), we emphasised our view that the most effective way to manage this issue would be for the UK Government to agree to dynamic alignment with the EU to obviate the need for EHCs. We asked for a written update to be provided by the UK Government on their position on dynamic alignment.

We also pressed for clarification on the UK Government’s intended relationship with European Environment Agency (EEA), noting that the issue of the ongoing relationship with the EEA is important to Scottish Government.

We raised concerns over the declining price of beef and called for urgent work to commence to amass the evidence demonstrating that a compensation scheme is necessary.

We also raised concerns on Geographical Indications (GIs). We noted Defra’s own Technical Notice recognises that the EU may not continue to protect UK GI products which puts in jeopardy protection for Scottish producers. We stated our view that this should be a priority in FEP negotiations and that the threat to UK GIs should be removed by the UK agreeing to continue to recognise EU GIs.

In relation to Primary Legislation, we raised concerns around the delay of the passage of Defra’s Agriculture Bill and pressed for greater clarity on contingency mechanisms for payments, should they become necessary.

In relation to secondary legislation, we asked that work progress on evaluating those areas which are subject to a competency dispute on the extent of devolved competence.

Finally, on funding, we requested clarity on UK Government plans to replace EU funding for Pillar 2 payments and questioned whether this would include all areas currently covered under the current Pillar 2 scheme, including agri-environment, forestry and LEADER. We expressed disappointment that a Minister from HM Treasury had not been able to attend the meeting and agreed that a Minister should be invited to join the next meeting in September.

In relation to the Bew review, we expressed our frustration at the refusal to share advice provided to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We requested an update on the Bew review timings and asked whether the UK Government would commit to implement the review’s findings.

Due to time constraints, a range of AOB items that we wished to raise, covering visa schemes for non-EU nationals within the fishing industry, plant passporting of timber and the fruit and vegetable aid scheme. These issues will be taken forward at official level.

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 in London on 16 September 2019.

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

Yours sincerely

FERGUS EWING

ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM

MAIRI GOUGEON
Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)  
Communiqué  
24 June 2019

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 24 June at the Defra offices in 2 Marsham Street, London and via video conference from Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The meeting was chaired by Robert Goodwill MP, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK Government: Robert Goodwill MP, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Lord Duncan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland; and Kevin Foster, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales.

From the Scottish Government: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy; Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform; and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment;

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

In the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, Norman Fulton, Head of Food and Farming Group at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs attended the meeting.

The Chair opened the meeting by providing an update on the recent political developments and presented the jointly developed future work programme for the period between now and December 2020. Key areas of work include the preparations for the UK’s exit from the EU, domestic policy and legislation, common frameworks and funding.

All administrations agreed that it was important to continue to prepare for a no deal exit while this remained a potential outcome and the group considered the potential impacts focusing on food supply and support for sectors, including the impact on markets and non-tariff barrier delays. With four months until a potential no deal exit, ministers also raised a number of outstanding issues that require resolution, including support for the sheep, beef and dairy sectors, Geographical Indications recognition and addressing operational challenges on export health certificates. Discussions then focused on the implications of the timing of the Agriculture Bill, the importance of timely collaborative discussions and agreement on how environmental governance within each administration will work cohesively and issues relating to other bills and secondary legislation.

Noting disappointment that a Minister from HM Treasury had not been able to attend, the group agreed that a Minister should be invited to join the next meeting in September. The group also discussed progress with the current independent review of intra-UK allocation of domestic farm support funding. Scottish Government requested that officials follow up on: i) a visa scheme for non EU national in the fishing industry; ii) plant passporting (timber); and iii) the fruit and vegetables aid scheme.