

Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) Communiqué

10 October 2019

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Thursday 10 October at the Scottish Government offices in St Andrew's House in Edinburgh. The meeting was chaired by Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Scottish Government.

Participating were:

From the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and Colin Clark MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland and Lord Commissioner of the Treasury;

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

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

The meeting was brought forward from 28 October to allow for timely discussion of critical No Deal issues, including plans for providing sectoral support.

The Chair opened the meeting by noting the recent publication of the Scottish Government's 'Overview of No Deal Preparations' and UK Government's 'No Deal Readiness Report', and earlier publication of the Welsh Government's 'No Deal Brexit Action Plan'. Ministers from the Scottish and Welsh Governments expressed very serious concerns about the negative consequences that a No Deal Exit would have on citizens and businesses across the environment, food and rural affairs sectors. Ministers from the Scottish and Welsh Governments expressed their profound opposition to a No Deal Exit.

Scottish and Welsh Government Ministers also reiterated their repeated frustration that despite critical funding issues under discussion by the Inter-Ministerial Group, no Minister from HM Treasury was present at the meeting. Defra recognised the role of the established structures between the Devolved Administrations and HM Treasury and that financial matters were regularly under discussion by each administration's Finance Ministers.

The Chair invited Defra to provide an update on the UK Government's Exit negotiations with the EU. The Chair also expressed the Scottish Government's concerns about the Prime Minister's recent statements indicating an intention by the UK Government to diverge in future from EU environmental, product and labour standards and the negative impact that this would have on trade.

Defra provided an update on EU negotiations and set out the UK Government's firm commitment to maintaining the UK's high standards of environmental protections and employment rights and the ambition for the UK to lead the way.

The group discussed their concerns about the potential impacts of a No Deal Exit from the EU on the sheepmeat, beef, dairy and fisheries sectors, and considered options for providing support. The group agreed to work together on developing support packages, for potential use should changes in market conditions necessitate the need for such support, and to carry out further detailed work with HM Treasury. They also agreed to jointly monitor market changes across the UK and consider support for other affected sectors, as appropriate.

Ministers from the Scottish and Welsh Governments expressed their own and stakeholders' deep frustrations about the lack of clarity on critical outstanding No Deal Exit issues including whether perishable seafood exports would be prioritised at Dover and Holyhead, and about the disproportionate impact of an Export Health Certificate requirement.

The group noted that further work was taking place on these issues and joint working would be required to provide the best possible mitigations.

Ministers then discussed a range of other outstanding issues including export of seed potatoes, and communications with businesses on Exit readiness.

ENDS