

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

**20 May 2020**

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Wednesday 20 May by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Scottish Government.

The attending ministers were:

From the UK Government: Rt Hon. George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defra, David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; and Robin Walker MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

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

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

From the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths SM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the recent publication of the UK Government's UK/EU negotiation legal texts, commenting that Devolved Administrations had not had time to sufficiently digest them for discussion.

The Group discussed Transition Period preparedness with a focus on deliverability of the EU exit programmes in the context of Covid-19. Ministers from the Scottish and Welsh Governments once again stated the case for an extension to the Transition Period, before agreeing that all four administrations should prioritise joint work to support businesses and operational preparedness. The Group agreed to greater transparency and involvement in all this work.

Devolved Ministers highlighted significant concerns around tourism and the impact of Covid-19 on the rural economy. They also questioned the UK Government's position on operational delivery, whether there is enough time to deal with issues arising from the conclusion of UK/EU trade talks, and whether they were confident that all necessary deadlines will be met. Defra confirmed they would update the group on Transition Period preparations, continue to ensure that devolved competence is respected and reiterated its position that preparations were deliverable in the time available.

Scottish Ministers highlighted that each administration has different parliamentary processes that operate at differing speeds that requires factoring in and respecting. They pointed out the burden on the Scottish Government was quite high on what is and is not manageable under the current situation.

The Group then discussed the latest Covid-19 position in each UK nation, with a focus on identifying ongoing and emerging issues within EFRA sectors such as food security and supply. This included discussions on supporting sectors through the crisis and promoting local produce, where appropriate.

The meeting concluded with proposals for a separate meeting on Covid-19 recovery stage thinking and the group agreed that green recovery should feature as an agenda item at a future meeting.

The group noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in June and would be hosted by Defra.