



David Duguid MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of  
State for Scotland

28 January 2021

Dear David,

### **Seafood Exports from Scotland**

Thank you for your letter of 22 January about the serious situation currently facing Scotland's seafood exporters. I am grateful to you for your assistance in amplifying to your colleagues in the UK Government the concerns we are hearing about on a daily basis, and which I and my Ministerial colleagues and Scottish Government officials continue to raise with UK Government counterparts.

You will have seen my letter of 26 January to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs offering my full support to the industry proposal to establish a Ministerial-led joint taskforce to work together with businesses to address the issues they are now experiencing. I understand that this has now been agreed by the UK Government, so would hope it can get to work without delay.

Given the gravity of the situation facing this crucial industry, upon which thousands of Scottish jobs depend, affected businesses and communities will expect us to set aside political considerations and to focus on tackling the issues at hand. I have sought to avoid political point-scoring in order to underline to those most directly affected by this situation that we are working together. It is in this light, that I need to express my serious disappointment at some of the statements made by UK Government Ministers which imply that the situation at the three commercially-operated logistics hubs in Scotland are somehow the result of a lack of Scottish Government or FSS preparation or resourcing. This is categorically not the case.

The implied criticism can also be seen in the section of the UK Government's 19 January press announcement on the £23m compensation scheme relating to the work of the hubs. Some of the points made in that publicly available statement are wrong, misleading and false and need to be corrected urgently:

1. *UK Government is stepping up extra physical resources to support certification in Scottish Hubs.*

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



There is no existing UK Government resource at the Scottish hubs. Following a request by the hub operators, Food Standards Scotland (not the UK Government) is adding resource at the hubs.

*2. The UK Government has provided two specialist certifiers to support Food Standards Scotland and DFDS over the last week.*

Two Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) staff spent two days at the DFDS hub last week to carry out a work study in order to better understand the overall issues leading to delays, not to provide certification support to FSS or DFDS.

*3. An experienced certifying officer from Defra is also currently in Lanarkshire supporting Official Veterinarians with the issuing of health certificates.*

Neither the Scottish Government nor Food Standards Scotland are aware of any such experienced Defra certifying officer undertaking this work in Lanarkshire. If there is, then we would welcome further information about this e.g. where they are based; with whom they are working; for who they are issuing EHCs.

In addition to the points raised by the press statement, I also understand the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster mentioned at the recent Scottish Brexit Business Roundtable that the UK Government Chief Veterinary Officer had visited DFDS in Larkhall last week. While it was at one stage proposed that the CVO would visit, in the end it was the two rather more junior members of APHA staff who were despatched to Larkhall.

This is a fast-moving situation, involving many different arms of the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the hub operators and the sector itself. It is perfectly possible that the inaccuracies highlighted above derive from simple 'crossed wires'. Nevertheless, I trust you will understand why it is important for me to 'set the record straight'.

Yours sincerely,



**FERGUS EWING**