

FOI/19/00949

Details of any dates, times and minutes relating to meetings between Fergus Ewing and Scottish Environment LINK in (a) 2016 (b) 2017 (c) 2018.

Date	Time	Type	Organisation/Individual met with	Subject
25/07/2016	1600 – 1700	Meeting	Scottish Environment LINK	N/A
05/12/2017	1315 – 1400	Meeting	Scottish Environment LINK to discuss agriculture and fisheries within the context of Brexit	Rural Economy/Farming/Fisheries/Brexit
20/06/2018	1600 – 1700	Meeting	Scottish Environment LINK	Farming

From: [Redacted text]

Sent: 26 June 2018 08:13

To: Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy [Redacted text] Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform [Redacted text]

Cc: [Redacted text]

Subject: Note of Mr Ewing's meeting with SE Link - Wed 20 June 2018 - and Action Points

Mr Ewing met with Scottish Environment Link on Wed 20 June to discuss future Agriculture and Rural Policy, with thanks to [Redacted text] the following is a read out of the meeting with Action Points for ARE, EU Hub and Forestry colleagues.

Notes/ action points:

Introductions

- Mr Ewing and SE Link all welcomed this meeting, following agreement earlier this year to hold bi-annual meetings during this period of rapid change.

Agricultural transition

- Mr Ewing began the meeting by offering to give an overview of the transition consultation announced today, noting it was the only Brexit plan in Britain. He highlighted the key messages of stability, confidence and simplicity. Noted general agreement all round on the need for significant change, and a lot of agreement on the general direction of change, but stressed that it is not possible to devise meaningful post Brexit strategy while so many unknowns, e.g. free movement, single market, WTO tariffs, non-reg barriers, funding etc. He acknowledged that more work was needed on Pillar 2
- SE LINK had not had time to consider but welcomed the general overview provided. They did however note that planning for transition requires sense of where you are transitioning to, e.g. if the capping of payments to single holdings frees up monies for pilot projects, in what direction are these pilot projects targeted?
 - **Action Point: (ARE & EU Hub colleagues to consider)**
Following the meeting SE Link asked for further discussion at official level on what all this meant.

Future vision for Scotland

- SE LINK: felt they had more of a sense from Wales and UK, even though they acknowledge Mr Ewing's point that specific decisions cannot be taken with the uncertainties highlighted.
- Mr Ewing responded that he has set out a clear vision: one where the purpose of farming is to produce high quality food with high environmental and animal welfare standards. He clearly stated that food production goes hand in hand with the environment. To this extent there was comparisons with UKG vision

but major source of concern that the UKG visions does not acknowledge the importance of the outcome of producing high quality food. Mr Ewing noted that this duality is highlighted in the SE LINK's own survey and that the two are inextricably linked, using the phrase "farming sustainably is farming well". Environmental efforts would reduce if no support for food production as domestic produce would be pushed off the shelves by imports to lesser quality and standards.

- Mr Ewing also highlighted the clear work underway in connection with the good food nation and it was acknowledged that one of the recommendations from the Agricultural Champions report was to join up future agriculture strategy with land use, GFN, NCRA, forestry strategy, flood alleviation, biodiversity etc.
- SE LINK: agree that many of the things that eNGOs look to be delivered can be done so through food production. However, they noted there are other outcomes that are not so closely tied to food production – carbon capture, natural beauty, tourism etc. Polling shows clear high levels of public support for delivering for wildlife, biodiversity and climate change for example. SE LINK noted it would be helpful to make the links clearer, especially with land use, biodiversity and GFN. On biodiversity in particular noted that if this is not done, discussion of Aichi targets becomes theoretical rather than a reality.
- SE LINK: specifically asked about links to forestry strategy and proposed timings. Mr Ewing noted he was keen to get on with it, that he will make timetable public in next couple of weeks. He noted that he is leaning towards a consultation in September, feeling it is important to get it all the thinking done and then present whole plan but there would be pre-discussion leading up to that. Scottish Woodland Trust updated Mr Ewing on their plan to announce a pre-consultation document at the RHS. Mr Ewing asked for a further meeting with Scottish Woodland Trust ahead of the next SE LINK meeting to specifically consider forestry issues.
 - **Action Point: (Forestry colleagues)**
Forestry colleagues to take forward request for a further meeting between Scottish Woodland Trust and Mr Ewing.

Working to improve knowledge and understanding in farmers

- SE LINK asked for Mr Ewing's views on what they can do to help ensure farmers understand that farming sustainably is farming well and are skilled to respond. They noted that this would help ensure that farmers are best placed to get the most from the market, but also noted there were wider market issues (supply chains etc.) affecting both food production and environmental outcomes that could not be addressed just through agriculture policy.
- Mr Ewing noted the good work already going on (monitor farms, one-to-one, SRUC advice including on environmental schemes, forestry commission's great scheme on sheep and trees) The NCRA proposals on civic engagement were also noted. MR Ewing noted he was always open to new ideas.

Rural population and planning

- Mr Ewing ended the meeting by raising a key concern of his, which was the effect of all of this on people and population in rural Scotland. He noted that we do not have enough people in rural Scotland and part of this is not having enough houses. He noted we need more flexibility around planning, otherwise there will be no one in rural Scotland to administer environmental schemes or to plant the trees etc. He suggested that planning in rural areas will need a bit of a change in mind set or everyone will lose. If we want smaller scale farmers, crofts, foresters etc. there needs to be houses and the importance of uplift in planning value in and of itself will immediately empower such small holders.
- SE LINK noted the solution to this was for a more strategic approach to land use, and that the issues were much wider than planning rules (availability of land etc.) but noted their strong view that it should not be the environment leg of the sustainability stool that falls away. [it was also noted after the meeting that greenbelt restrictions were in the main part brought into the system to protect agricultural land!].
 - **Action Point: (EU Hub and ARE colleagues)**
The meeting ran over slightly, leaving SE LINK unable to make a final point. They asked officials to pass to Mr Ewing their reflection that they warmly welcomed Mr Ewing's strong acknowledgement of the importance of the environment and the duality of environmental benefits and food production. But they did not, however, feel this vision has been made clearly to the public – especially the link with stewardship and GFN – and that the recent REC meeting showed that this was clearly felt across all stakeholders. They also noted the vision needs to be wider than just agriculture and rural economy. They noted that if this was done it would provide much needed ammunition in eNGO and SE LINK's own calls for Scotland to have the powers to implement bespoke agricultural policies in future. SE LINK noted the same point applies to fisheries and will be made at the upcoming meeting between Mr Ewing and MCS.

Regards

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

Environment & Land Use Strategy and Sponsorship Hub Division
Scottish Government
[Redacted text]