

Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, Europe and External Affairs – meeting with Australian High Commissioner – 10 November 2020

Attendees

Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs
George Brandis QC, His Excellency, Australian High Commissioner to the UK
REDACTED INFORMATION

Introduction

1. The Cabinet Secretary thanked the High Commissioner for reaching out to arrange the discussion. REDACTED INFORMATION

Reflections on COVID-19

2. MR invited GB to reflect on the Australian response to COVID. REDACTED INFORMATION

3. MR explained Scotland had almost eradicated the virus over summer before a resurgence which was driven initially by the resumption of overseas travel. REDACTED INFORMATION

Aus-UK Free Trade Agreement

4. MR invited the High Commissioner to update on the progress of the Aus-UK Free Trade Agreement. REDACTED INFORMATION

5. REDACTED INFORMATION

6. MR welcomed the appetite to develop further trade opportunities, though explained the Scottish Government did have some concerns with the initial scoping assessment published by UKG given the potential impact of food and agricultural sectors. MR noted the importance of Geographical Indicators to Scotland

7. MR suggested officials should follow up discussion around the Space industry with a view to a follow up Minister to Minister discussions in due course. MR also highlighted the Australian British Chamber of Commerce recent trade missions to the UK on both Fintech and Infrastructure, noting Scotland would be keen to attract these UK bound delegations north to discover Scottish investment opportunities. REDACTED INFORMATION

8. REDACTED INFORMATION

Culture

8. MR noted his disappointment that the Year of Scotland in Australia 2020 had unfortunately been postponed due to the pandemic. MR explained the programme was set to be the largest showcase of traditional Scottish Music heritage in Australia ever and invited the High Commissioner to suggest any potential routes available to support the delivery of the programme in 2021. REDACTED INFORMATION

EU Withdrawal Scotland's Constitutional Future

9. MR explained earlier in the day he gave evidence to the UK House of Lords Committee on common frameworks and set out the threat to devolution posed by the UKG Internal Market bill. MR noted the bill undermine the ability of the Scottish Parliament to regulate to protect health, safety and environmental standards and confirmed the Scottish Government's intention to challenge the bill at every opportunity. MR noted this is a common cause shared with the other Devolved Administrations of Wales and Northern Ireland.

10. MR confirmed the Scottish Government strongly believe Scotland's interests would be best served from being an independent country and securing membership of the European Union. There was now consistent polling trends in Scotland which suggest the majority of the population are in favour of independence.

11. MR set out the intention to publish a draft bill before the end of the parliamentary terms which sets out the question to be asked and the timescale in which, within the next term of Parliament, we consider the referendum should be held. MR noted following the Scottish elections in May 2021 there could then be no democratic justification for UKG to ignore the rights of the people of Scotland to choose their own future.

12. GB enquired about the proposed timing of the referendum post the Scottish election REDACTED INFORMATION. MR confirmed he would hope a second referendum could be held by end 2021. REDACTED INFORMATION

13. REDACTED INFORMATION

Conclusions

14. REDACTED INFORMATION MR invited the High Commissioner to visit the Isle of Ulva in his constituency on his next visit to Scotland. The Isle, on which Macquarie was born, has been recently transformed through an innovative community buy out scheme supported in part by the Macquarrie Bank.

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