

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

27 April 2020

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 27 April by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Welsh 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, Defra; David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; and Douglas Ross MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland.

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 AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming ministers to the meeting.

The Group discussed the challenges of Covid-19, with a focus on supporting sectors through the crisis and considered the recovery of these sectors after the crisis has abated. It was agreed that consideration of a four-nation approach for EFRA sectors was important and would complement measures that administrations may take to tailor responses in each UK nation. UK ministers agreed to provide further information on these proposals. Scottish Ministers raised concerns that seasonal worker schemes were insufficient to meet demand.

The Group then discussed the progress of negotiations with the EU and the rest of the world with the devolved governments calling for greater transparency and involvement. The Welsh and Scottish Governments reiterated their strong calls for an extension to the transition period in order to meet the challenges of delivery and to mitigate the impact for businesses in adapting to new trading arrangements at a time when their focus will be on economic survival.

Ministers also discussed re-prioritisation of the secondary legislation and operational preparedness programmes. Scottish and Welsh ministers advised they were not in a position to give full agreement to this programme until they had considered further. UK Government agreed to provide further information.

Scottish ministers again highlighted that it is important for papers to be shared in reasonable time for consideration and suggested that draft versions could be circulated earlier to assist in reaching agreement on key issues.

The Group welcomed the establishment of the Joint Committee and Specialised Committee on the Northern Ireland Protocol and looked forward to key decisions being made to unlock progress. Ministers from the Devolved Administrations again called for UK Government to provide greater transparency and involvement.

The Group agreed to hold an additional meeting in May to discuss any Covid-19 issues and transition preparations.

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