

**Communiqué**  
**Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)**  
**14 September 2020**

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 14 September by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The attending ministers were:

From the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Defra, Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defra, David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; and David Duguid MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland.

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

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

The chair welcomed Ministers to the meeting.

The Group discussed the levels of border checks which would take place from 2021 and agreed there should be a pragmatic risk-based approach which fully aligns with Ministers' domestic and international legislative obligations. While seeking further detail and clarity on how the proposed Border Operating Model would work in practice, Ministers reaffirmed their wish to ensure unfettered access for goods originating from Northern Ireland to GB whilst ensuring other goods transiting Northern Ireland to GB were subject to the appropriate controls.

Ministers then explored the operational challenges presented by the Northern Ireland Protocol in ensuring unfettered access for Northern Irish goods entering the GB market. Northern Ireland and Scotland Ministers both raised issues linked to dealing with mixed consignments, infrastructure, and funding in order to ensure that the appropriate Border systems are fully operational by the end of the Transition Period. The Welsh Government also highlighted the fact the Protocol is not route specific, so raises challenges relating to indirect trade routes and their impact on competition.

The Group discussed the UK Government's Internal Market Bill where Scottish and Welsh Ministers stressed their deep and underlying concerns and continued opposition to the Bill. This centred on the Bill, as drafted, breaking international law and undermining existing devolved settlements. Both administrations stressed their strong belief that Common Frameworks remain the most appropriate mechanism for managing potential future divergence and stressed their continued commitment to that programme.

The Group reviewed and agreed the work plan for frameworks, discussed plans for secondary legislation for the remainder of the year, and considered preparedness

and business readiness for the end of the transition period. Scottish and Welsh Ministers raised concerns about business preparedness and called for more detail and cooperation in responding to the challenge of supporting businesses to prepare. Ministers agreed to work jointly to improve preparedness. Finally, Ministers recognised the potential impact of Covid on the UK's readiness for the end of the Transition Period.