

## **Communiqué**

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

**29 July 2020**

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Wednesday 29 July by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The attending ministers were:

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

From the Scottish Government: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism; and Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

From the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The chair welcomed Ministers to the meeting.

The Group reviewed the progress of the Secondary Legislation work programme and the need to work closely on sequencing to secure delivery across legislatures. Ministers discussed the challenges and risks associated with completion of the programme by January 2021. Scottish and Welsh Ministers again put on record their respective parliaments' expectation that they would have adequate time to consider any legislation and proposed arrangements fully.

The significant work on Borders affecting Devolved Administrations, Defra and the Border and Protocol Delivery Group, and the need for clarity of responsibilities to secure progress, was discussed including the inter-connection between Borders and the Northern Ireland Protocol. Mr Poots advised that his aim was to ensure that the Northern Ireland Protocol was implemented in a way that maximised the flow of trade in agri-food, with as few barriers as possible. He emphasised that costs incurred should not be applied to businesses and stressed the need to work together across Administrations to ensure logistics to enable businesses to operate as freely as possible. In relation to ongoing trade negotiations it was important that there was full engagement at both Ministerial level and Official level on Agricultural Tariffs.

Scottish and Welsh Ministers shared their disappointment over the absence of any meaningful consultation regarding the UK Government's recently published border proposals between Great Britain and the EU. Devolved Administrations sought rapid

improvements regarding the sharing of information and the need for urgent clarity on funding. The Group then agreed governance arrangements for Border Control Post proposals in the devolved administrations in order to secure progress and to implement arrangements by the end of the Transition Period.

The Group then agreed the 2020 forward work programme for the EFRA Common Frameworks, with the devolved administrations being clear that any frameworks need to be agreed consensually between the administrations and not imposed by one.

The Group discussed the UK Internal Market White Paper published 16 July 2020. Mr Poots stated his main objective was to ensure that Northern Ireland agri-food produce could be traded anywhere in the UK on an equal footing with other competitors in the United Kingdom. The Scottish and Welsh administrations were equally clear that they strongly oppose the proposals, do not believe legislation is required, and that frameworks are the right mechanism to manage any potential future divergence,

Finally, the Scottish Government again pushed for a sheepmeat compensation scheme such that had been planned last year to be reviewed, and the need for clarity on the situation of the UK Government's third country seed potato application. The UK Government agreed to progress both requests. The Welsh Government noted their disappointment that no animal welfare representative sits on the UK Government's Trade & Agriculture Commission.