

Communiqué
Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)
28 June 2021

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 28 June by video conference. The meeting was chaired by George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food 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; David Duguid MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland; and Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland.

From the Scottish Government: Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands; and Màiri McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform.

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

From the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd; and Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change.

The meeting started with a discussion on administrations' Net Zero ambitions and agreement that decarbonising and increasing carbon sequestration is a shared priority. While each administration has their own unique opportunities and challenges, all are grappling with common issues many of which can be best achieved by working together and by sharing learning and policy expertise. Ministers agreed that their respective officials should work closer together going forward and look for further opportunities for joint working.

The group then discussed the latest issues on trade, including the UK-Australia free trade agreement, where agreement in principle has been reached, and UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) governance. The Secretary of State outlined some of the key agri-food aspects of the Australia agreement including market access for meat and drink. Devolved administrations' ministers raised serious concerns linked to animal welfare standards and the lack of engagement with the DAs during negotiations. DA ministers sought and received assurances that they would have the opportunity to input into an impact assessment relating to the deals potential impact on farming and food industries. On UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement governance, The Secretary of State outlined the proposal on governance arrangements across the EFRA policy portfolio, recognising DA interests and the need to ensure full and proper engagement.

Ministers then received an update regarding the recent Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies, including potential for gene editing reform to allow investment into development of gene editing plants including for purposes of research and innovation. DA Ministers noted the update and provided their initial views but required further detail before any future discussions could occur.

Funding of fisheries and the timeline for future engagement on details of new schemes then followed. Devolved administrations ministers expressed concern that details had not been forthcoming despite initial announcements in December and stressed that it should respect devolved competencies.

Following an update on the Common Frameworks programme, Ministers discussed issues linked to the proposed Border Operating arrangements, including unfettered market access and Border Control Post timetabling, and the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Concluding the meeting Defra's Secretary of State proposed further work take place to engage with stakeholders, academics and businesses on technical issues affecting agriculture across the UK

Finally, the administrations discussed ongoing issues relating to seed potato trade with the EU.