

Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)**17 February 2020**

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 17 February at the DAERA offices in Dundonald House, Belfast. The meeting was chaired by Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

From the Scottish Government: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (via dial in from Glasgow), Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

From the Welsh Government: Mr Tim Render, Environment and Rural Affairs. Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, sent her apologies.

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

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming ministers and officials to the first meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group to be held since the UK's departure from the EU on 31 January 2020 noting the challenges and opportunities for the year ahead.

In preparation for the EU and Rest of World negotiations, ministers from each of the administrations highlighted priority sectors and issues noting the risks of not reaching a trade agreement with the EU. In particular, Scottish ministers pressed for an update on areas in which UK Government would seek equivalence, highlighting seed potatoes as one immediate example where any delay in applications would be critical and damaging. Following the meeting UK Government confirmed they have applied for equivalence.

The Northern Ireland Minister indicated that a trade deal which consisted of zero tariff and zero quotas would be highly desirable and highlighted Northern Ireland's unique position in relation to regulatory alignment with the EU.

Scottish ministers also sought assurances on how the UK Government would meet the commitment to maintain the highest standards of environmental protection in future agreements and respect devolved responsibilities in this area.

Ministers from the Devolved Administrations repeated concerns on the need for their meaningful engagement in the preparation and negotiation of trade agreements. Defra agreed to share documents as early as possible and encourage other Whitehall Departments to do likewise.

The Group considered the Northern Ireland / Ireland Protocol and agreed the need to undertake further detailed work on a cross administration work plan to progress this constructively.

To ensure domestic preparedness for January 2021 the Group also agreed to produce a shared set of planning assumptions to prepare for broad scenarios at the end of the transition period and discussed border preparations and business engagement.

In closing, the Group noted the progress of the Defra primary legislation programme and acknowledged the highly ambitious and complex programme of secondary legislation required to ensure a fully functioning statute book for the end of the transition period. In calling for further detail as early as possible, Scottish ministers reminded on the need to respect the responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament and other devolved assemblies.

Under AoB, Devolved ministers noted with disappointment the absence once again of a Treasury Minister or senior official, emphasising the need for greater certainty on future funding. Scottish ministers pressed UK Government to provide further details on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to reconfirm its previous commitment to provide equivalent funding to that received under EU funding programmes.