

Communique
Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)
16 November 2020

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 16 November by video conference. The meeting was chaired by George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, UK Government.

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: 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.

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

The meeting started with Defra providing an update on the UK's trade negotiations with the EU.

The group then had a discussion on the UK Government's proposals for CAP replacement EU funding. Devolved government ministers raised serious concerns in respect of the overall funding package and the methodology used. The devolved administrations all stated that it fell significantly short of expectations based on previous UK Government commitments. Devolved government ministers then set out the challenges that they would face if the UK Government did not revisit how the package was calculated, before requesting that the funding package be re-evaluated. Finally, the devolved administrations once again sought discussions with a HM Treasury minister as a matter of urgency.

The group then discussed the development of provisional common frameworks in areas of returning EU law that intersect with the devolution settlements. Ministers noted that progress was being made but the timeline remained challenging. Nonetheless, these provisional frameworks were important to have in place and operable from 1 January 2021 so that the administrative arrangements across the four administrations were clear. Progress would need to continue so that the group would have the opportunity to confirm their agreement at the next IMG meeting in December, and prior to sharing provisional frameworks with the Joint Ministerial Committee for EU Negotiations.

Each administration then set out key areas of focus and concerns in relation to their preparations for the end of the transition period. The group discussed the readiness of IT systems, preparations and capacity at local authority level, and work on supporting businesses to understand certification related requirements in the meat and fisheries sectors. The group discussed export health certificates specifically and the importance of having clarity on available funding, the import and export processes, as well as the need to address the outstanding issues in respect of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The group recognised the importance of prioritising the flow of goods in their preparations.

The meeting finished with a discussion of the Nephrops product journey, which was an illustrative example of the complexity of moving those goods after the transition period has ended. It was

agreed that further work between the four administrations will continue in order to achieve a joint understanding of the challenges that require resolution.