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5 December 2022

Dear Edward,

## **INTER-MINISTERIAL GROUP FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (IMG EFRA) MEETING**

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs meeting held on 7 November 2022.

The hybrid meeting was hosted by the Scottish Government with Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity acting as chair. Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands also represented the Scottish Government.

The main items of discussion were Retained EU Law and issues relating to the Scottish Government's Deposit Return Scheme and VAT. The group also received updates on the proposed Target Operating Model for UK Borders and the Joint Fisheries Statement.

The group noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in December. A read out of the meeting and summary of attendance is included in the attached communiqué that has been published on the Scottish Government website.

We hope this summary is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**MAIRI GOUGEON**

**LORNA SLATER**

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## **Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) Communiqué: 7 November 2022**

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) met on Monday 7 November by video conference.

The meeting was chaired by Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

The attending ministers were:

- from the Scottish Government: Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands
- from the UK Government: Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; John Lamont MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland; and James Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
- from the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd.

In the absence of Northern Ireland ministers, Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs attended on behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The meeting opened with a discussion of retained EU Law and the UK Government's Bill that seeks to make it easier to repeal and replace retained EU law. Devolved Ministers sought clarity on Defra's approach to retained EU law and how Defra intended to work with the devolved administrations on this significant work programme. Ministers also discussed concerns regarding the proposed 'sun-set' date contained within the Bill, and how devolved aspects of the Bill would be addressed while respecting the position of the devolved administrations and the need to ensure a functioning UK internal market.

Ministers then discussed the proposed Target Operating Model for UK Borders. Devolved Ministers raised significant concerns regarding future biosecurity under the current proposals and whether they would provide the necessary levels of protection. Overall, Ministers expressed preference for a GB-wide system, acknowledging that biosecurity measures are strengthened when we operate as one island.

The group then discussed the Scottish Government's request to exclude deposits from VAT within its proposed Deposit Return Scheme, which comes into operation in less than a year's time. With HM Treasury still in the process of developing a workable solution, Ministers agreed that they would press HM Treasury for an urgent decision. Finally, Scottish Ministers notified the group that it was exploring whether an exclusion to the UK Internal Market Act is required and an update would be brought to the group in due course.

The next item for discussion was the Joint Fisheries Statement. Ministers discussed concerns around the timeline for publishing the statement agreeing to proceed as previously decided.

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Finally, Scottish Government raised concerns that businesses within the red meat sector could be prevented from exporting their goods as a result of changes to animal health visit regulations.

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