

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands
Mairi Gougeon MSP
Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and
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Lorna Slater MSP



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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 6 March 2023.

The meeting was hosted by the Welsh Government with Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd acting as chair. Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands and Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy, and Biodiversity represented the Scottish Government.

The main items of discussion were Retained EU Law, the Scottish Government's Deposit Return Scheme, and food security. The group also received an update on a number of proposed animal welfare policy issues.

The group noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in April 2023. 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

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Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) Communiqué: 6 March 2023

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) met on Monday 6 March 2023 by video conference.

The meeting was chaired by Minister Griffiths, Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd

The attending ministers were:

- Rebecca Pow MP, Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience, Mark Spencer MP, Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries, James Davies MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, John Lamont MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Scotland Office, Steve Baker MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office
- From the Scottish Government: Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands and Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy, and Biodiversity.

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 absence of the Secretary of State, on business in South America, was noted.

The meeting opened with a discussion on the Retained EU Law) Bill which is currently at committee stage in the House of Lords. Ministers updated on their respective administrations' progress with this work, discussed plans for the related parliamentary programmes to retain, repeal or reform individual items of legislation as appropriate, and commended the positive engagement between the administrations in this area.

Minister Slater reiterated how an exclusion from the UK Internal Market Act, with a broad scope to cover all deposit return schemes across the UK but, at a minimum, an exclusion for Scotland's deposit return scheme regulations, is needed in advance of the Scottish scheme launch on 16 August. Scottish Ministers pressed Defra Ministers now for a decision regarding their support for an exclusion and a timeline for when a final UK Government position may be reached. Defra Ministers acknowledged that Scottish Ministers have fully followed the agreed processes, that the relevant Common Framework had agreed to seek ministerial views on its recommendations of an exclusion, while also highlighting Defra's need to progress with seeking agreement internally as set out in the process for considering UK IMA exclusions in Common Framework areas.

Ministers then discussed the current shortages of particular food items being experienced in parts of the UK, and the wider issue of food security more generally. Ministers discussed the effects of climate change, as well as the cumulative effects of issues such as energy prices, labour shortages and the war in Ukraine, on food supply chains and the need for risk mitigations going forward. It was agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting in April.

Finally, Welsh and Scottish Ministers raised the lack of progress on various pieces of animal welfare legislation and asked for an update on this at the earliest convenience.