Dear Michael,

FUTURE RELATIONSHIP NEGOTIATIONS

I am writing to you, on behalf of the Scottish Parliament’s Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, with regard to the on-going future relationship negotiations between the European Union and UK Government. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee recognises that the future relationship negotiations are on-going, albeit via video-conference, and therefore we continue to scrutinise the impact of these negotiations upon devolved competences and Scotland’s economy and society. Accordingly, there are a number of areas where the Committee requests a written response from you in recognition that devolved competences, such as fisheries, have been the subject of negotiating rounds to date.

Firstly, the Committee seeks an update from you on what discussions have taken place between the Scottish and UK Government’s with regard to the negotiating position being adopted by the UK Government in the negotiations. In this regard, the Committee notes that the European Commission has published a draft legal text which effectively sets out the EU negotiating position. It is also noted that the UK Government has specifically requested that the proposals provided by the UK Government to the European Commission are not published. The Committee would therefore welcome an update on the position being adopted by the UK Government in the negotiations particularly with regard to issues dealing with devolved competences, such as fisheries. The Committee requests a clear indication of the UK Government’s position with regard to continued participation in Erasmus + and Horizon 2020.

Secondly, the Committee is acutely aware that the deadline for any extension of the current transition period is 1 July 2020 and is aware that the UK Government’s current position is that it does not intend to seek an extension to the transition period, which is set to end on 31 December 2020. The Committee recognises that the current global pandemic has had a fundamental impact upon all levels of government in Scotland, the UK and the EU. However, in light of the transformative impact of Covid-19 upon all aspects of government, including the future relationship negotiations, the Committee would welcome an update on what assessment the UK Government has
made of the impact of current events upon the ability for agreement to be reached, and the scope of any such agreement, within the current timetable. The Committee also requests details of what discussions the UK Government has had with the devolved administrations in this regard.

Finally, given the current timescales, there remains the potential for a No Deal outcome at the end of 2020. In this regard, the Committee asks that you provide us with details of what contingency planning the UK Government is undertaking for a No Deal outcome. Given the impact of Covid-19, the Committee would welcome details of what assessment has been of the capacity of the UK Government to manage a No Deal outcome in the context of Covid-19. Lastly, the implementation of the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol is a matter of significant interest to the Committee given the potential impacts arising from the Protocol for Scotland, and in particular the South West of Scotland. The Committee seeks an update on what discussions have taken place the Scottish Government with regard to the deliberations of the Specialised Committee on the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol.

Clearly, there are an extensive range of further issues that the Committee would wish to discuss with you. The Committee has recently had useful engagement with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon Alister Jack MP, with regard to issues relating to the future relationship negotiations. However, I would like to invite you to give evidence to the Committee prior to the European Council meeting on 18-19 June. My Clerks would be more than happy to discuss this further with your officials if that would be helpful.

In the meantime, can I pass on my best wishes to you, and the Secretary of State for Scotland who is copied into this letter, in these challenging times. I look forward to your response to this letter and to you giving evidence to the Committee in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Joan McAlpine MSP
Convener, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee