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Rural Economy and Connectivity

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Dear Edward,

DEFRA AND DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS MINISTERIAL MEETING

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the Defra and Devolved Administrations Ministerial meeting held on 6 November 2017.

The meeting was held in London and, as well as ourselves representing Scottish Government, attendees included: Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (in the chair); and Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by officials.

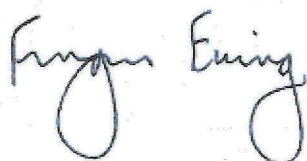
At the meeting, Mr Gove presented draft proposals setting out what UK frameworks for agriculture and fisheries could look like. It was agreed that Devolved Administrations would respond to these following due consideration. Discussions on frameworks are now being taken forward through a process agreed by the Joint Ministerial Committee (European Negotiations) and in line with the principles on common frameworks recently agreed between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. In relation to UK frameworks we raised the issue of the discard ban and choke species, and the need for flexibility in that area, and, as in previous meetings, sought clarity on future funding arrangements.

The next part of the meeting focussed on the proposed UK Agriculture and Fisheries Bills. Aside from limited information on the proposed timing of the introduction of the bills (provisionally May in the case of the Agriculture Bill and February in relation to the Fisheries Bill), no clarity on the UK Government's intentions was provided. Mr Gove also refused to share drafts of the Bill with the Devolved Administrations.

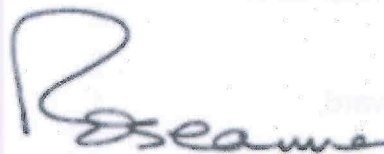
There was also discussion on trade preparations, where the Devolved Administrations all stressed the importance of their involvement and engagement and we expressed the need to avoid tariff and non-tariff barriers on food exports; operational readiness, where we emphasised the importance of maintaining environmental standards and protections; and the UK Government's 25 year environment plan, where Mr Gove expressed the view that the UK Government needed to raise its ambition to match that of the Devolved Administrations.

At Defra's request, the next meeting, scheduled for 14 December, will provisionally be moved from Cardiff to London due to Mr Gove's presence at Westminster being required. Like Welsh Government counterparts, we expect that Defra will accommodate a replacement meeting in Wales in January (and in Scotland and Northern Ireland thereafter) and, in view of the significance of the issues being discussed, that Mr Gove will take the necessary steps to ensure his availability.

We hope this summary is helpful. A letter to the Convenor of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on similar terms has also been issued.



FERGUS EWING



ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM