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Dear Edward,

DEFRA AND DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS MINISTERIAL MEETING ON EU EXIT

This letter updates the Committee on the key points from the Ministerial meeting between Defra and the Devolved Administrations held on 14 May 2018.

The meeting, which was held in Edinburgh, was chaired by Ms Cunningham and attended by Mr Ewing. Attendees from the other administrations included:

- Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;
- Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government.
- Hannah Blythyn, Minister for Environment, Welsh Government.

The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by senior officials from the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

At the meeting, we discussed a range of priority issues relating to Brexit including, but not limited to: the potential role of the Devolved Administrations in negotiations with the EU, progress made by officials in relation to exploratory discussions on possible UK frameworks, operational and legislative preparations for Brexit (including updates on draft UK Government primary and secondary legislation) and future funding.

While we recognised the good progress that had been made by officials in some areas, we stressed the need for much greater clarity, transparency and urgency in relation to Brexit preparations; in particular the need for the UK Government to share copies of draft Statutory Instruments, other key documents such as its draft Fisheries White Paper and Fisheries Bill, its Agriculture Bill and further details of its operational readiness work. As part of this, we again noted the need for the UK Government to share such information in sufficient time for meaningful consideration and engagement to be undertaken with the devolved administrations.

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We noted, however, that while significant constitutional and political disagreements remained (with reference to the Legislative Consent Motion on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill laid before the Scottish Parliament on 15 May), cooperation with the other administrations on Brexit preparations would continue wherever possible.

In relation to funding, we again emphasised the need for written guarantees on the quantum of funding available after Brexit, details of the UK Government's proposal for a "Shared Prosperity Fund" and clarity on the scope of the Treasury guarantee. In keeping with an action agreed at a previous meeting, we also stressed the importance of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury attending the group to provide advice and reassurance on future funding arrangements. In addition to the role of Pillar 1 and 2 funding, we took the opportunity to highlight the vital contribution that EU research funds such as Horizon 2020 and LIFE+ have made to Scotland, and pressed the UK Government to maintain access to these funding streams after Brexit as a priority.

In relation to other business, we again pressed for progress to be made on securing access to EU and non-EU labour; emphasising the importance of this for key Scottish sectors such as soft fruit picking, fisheries and seafood processing and reiterating the Scottish Government's preferred outcome of retaining free movement of labour. Responding to representations from stakeholders, we also sought, and secured, agreement for discussions on forestry funding to take place when the administrations meet in September.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 July in London.

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

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