

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform, and the Islands
Mairi Gougeon MSP
Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity
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Committee for Net Zero, Energy and Transport,
Scottish Parliament
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Dear Convener,

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 22 May 2023.

The 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, Land Reform, and the Islands also represented the Scottish Government.

The main items of discussion were the Scottish Government's Deposit Return Scheme and the UK Government's proposals for a ban on wet wipes containing plastic. Other items discussed included an update on the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework to achieve COP15 outcomes, and Retained EU Law. Finally, the group also received an update on the Scottish Government's Blue Economy ambitions.

The next meeting of the group is scheduled to take place in September 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.

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG

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Yours sincerely,

MAIRI GOUGEON

LORNA SLATER

Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) Communiqué: 22 May 2023

The Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) met on Monday 22 May 2023 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 UK Government: Thèrése Coffey MP, Secretary of State at DEFRA; Alister Jack MP, Secretary of State for Scotland; Rebecca Pow MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at DEFRA; and James Davies MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales
- From the Scottish Government: Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform, and the Islands
- From the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd, and Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change.

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 on biodiversity and how the administrations were going to collectively implement the Global Biodiversity Framework to achieve the COP15 outcomes. Ministers agreed that the JNCC should facilitate and coordinate a cross-UK response ahead of COP16.

The group then discussed Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme. Scottish Ministers impressed upon DEFRA the continuing urgency in securing a UK Government decision on an exclusion for DRS from the Internal Market Act and their disappointment at the time this is taking. Scottish Ministers reiterated they had followed the agreed common framework process and disagreed with suggestions that they had only sought an exclusion in March. UK Government Ministers confirmed that cross-Whitehall discussions were on-going and they could not prejudge their outcome. Finally, devolved ministers stated their dissatisfaction that the common framework process was being ignored.

The next item discussed was DEFRA's plans to ban the sale of wet wipes containing plastic where the DEFRA Secretary of State outlined her intention to introduce a ban in England only. However, she hoped devolved governments would be able to join DEFRA in a UK-wide-consultation. Devolved Ministers welcomed the policy direction, sought a short delay to enable them to align with the proposals, and highlighted the importance of following the common framework process.

The group then received an update from DEFRA on the UK Government's Retained EU (Revocation and Reform) Bill following recent developments. Devolved Ministers pressed for clarity on the level of reform to be undertaken, dispute mechanisms, managing divergence and retaining interpretive effects to preserve existing environmental protections.

The last substantive item saw the Scottish Government outline its vision and ambition for the Blue Economy, which was welcomed by the other administrations.

Lastly, the group briefly discussed the importance of food security following the Prime Minister's recent open letter to UK farmers.