

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

13 March 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Inter-Ministerial dialogue and engagement

During our general ministerial scrutiny session on 6 March with Lesley Griffiths MS, the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, the Minister noted that there has been no meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) since your predecessor Thérèse Coffey's time as Environment Secretary. Members were very concerned to hear this as the Committee believes that inter-governmental dialogue is important to support good policy development and implementation.

When questioned on avian flu and the classification and marketing of free range eggs as a result of birds being housed indoors, the Minister also told us that she had not been given advance notice by DEFRA of the intention to launch a Consultation on removing the 16-week derogation period in egg marketing standards legislation in England and Scotland, which opened on 9 January 2024 and closed on 5 March. The Minister told Members there had been no Ministerial level discussions with her about the intention to consult prior to receiving a letter inviting Wales to participate.

The consultation does not apply to Wales, and the Minister has suggested that the Welsh Government may take a different approach to England and Scotland by not removing the time limit, citing transparency for consumers as the reason why.

As noted in the UK Government EM issued on the EU regulations relating to the marketing of eggs, issued on 19 February 2024, this is a devolved policy area which is subject to the agricultural support



common framework. These Common Frameworks require the different administrations in the UK to engage proactively on potential areas of divergence in policy development.

The marketing of eggs appears to come within the scope of the Market Access Principles enshrined in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. As you will know, under the mutual recognition principle, eggs that meet the required standards in one part of the UK are able to be sold in any other part of the UK even if the standards there are different. The current situation raises concerns that Welsh egg producers could be put at a competitive disadvantage if the standards for marketing of eggs as 'free range' differs across the UK administrations.

In light of the Minister's comments about the extent of Inter-Ministerial dialogue and engagement, the Committee would like to seek assurances that regular IMG meetings will resume, and that channels of communication between UK Ministers and their counterparts in Wales will be opened up for early and constructive engagement on issues that affect our food producers and consumers. Members would also be interested to hear the UK Government's view on the possible change of free-range egg labelling, and its impact on Wales including the UK Government's expectation around the operation of the UK Internal Market Act in relation to this issue.

Kind regards,



Paul Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English