



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 30/11/2020

Ministers' assurances inadequate say crofters

Assurances given by UK ministers, at a Northern Isles meeting last week, that all is well with Brexit planning, were simply not enough says the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF).

"Our members are very worried about the effect of a no deal exit from the EU on the agricultural sector. For Shetland, it would be nothing short of catastrophic," said Eleanor Arthur, SCF's Shetland-based director. "Sheep are by far the main product of agriculture here, and if there are tariffs of 40% or even 50% sheep production will simply become unviable for most of us. The ministers at the meeting representing the UK Government just don't seem to get it. They admit that the sheep sector is the most exposed and say that, in the event of no deal, mechanisms for supporting the sheep industry are in place. What is the budget and when would it kick in? Surely it is an admission of failure that there needs to be mechanisms to mitigate the effects of Brexit?"

The meeting was arranged by Alastair Carmichael MP and featured mainly Shetland/Orkney food producers with Michael Gove MP (Minister for the Cabinet Office), George Eustice MP (Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and David Duguid MP (Scotland Office).

Russell Smith, SCF's lead on agriculture policy added, "Routine assurances on tariffs and welfare standards were given, as expected, but the reality is that multiple deadlines on negotiations have been missed, the opportunities to enshrine standards in law were not taken and the Internal Market bill threatens Scottish decision-making. It doesn't look like all is well, with less than five weeks to go to the end of the transition period. Then we have a pandemic crisis, which crofters are coping with, but with Brexit disruption piled on top, it is not surprising crofters are feeling a bit cynical and very worried."

Ms Arthur continued, "We simply cannot allow imports with lower food standards to enter the market and see our standards drop - UK food standards have to be maintained! Shetland has spent years building up our High Health Status and recognition in Europe that we have a premium product. This must be protected."

Ms Arthur concluded, "They say that all is well but the evidence simply is not there. Assurances are one thing but we need a workable plan and we are not getting one. It does not inspire confidence in the UK government to manage the whole Brexit process."

END

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Notes to editors

Please contact SCF office for high resolution photos