

Scottish seafood taskforce meets to drive progress

A new seafood taskforce met for the first time today (Friday 12 February), drawing together senior political figures, industry representatives and UK Government officials, all bidding to solve ongoing problems with exports.

Chaired by UK Government Minister for Scotland, David Duguid, the virtual meeting was attended by UK Environment Secretary George Eustice and Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism with the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce included industry representatives drawn from the catching, processing and exporting sectors.

Minister Duguid told the meeting:

This taskforce is about developing solutions and delivering action rapidly.

It is not a talking shop and we will provide evidence of delivery.

Mr Eustice said other UK Government working groups to tackle immediate problems would continue to operate and support businesses to adjust to the new requirements and troubleshoot where problems occur such as issues with Export Health Certificates and customs declarations.

During the meeting the movement of mixed loads of small consignments, known as groupage, was discussed and the variation in time taken for loads to be cleared, with constructive discussions on how practical solutions could be arrived at to ease the flow of goods.

Minister Duguid said after the meeting:

The spirit of co-operation between all parties was good to see and my officials will now drill down to identify areas for rapid action.

The next taskforce meeting is in a fortnight but our engagement with industry continues on a daily basis, as does our work to speed world-class Scottish seafood from port to plate as smoothly as possible.

The taskforce has a core body of representatives from stakeholders and UK Government departments but also has the ability to invite in other industry representatives and experts on an ad hoc basis

Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs and the UK Government Border Delivery & Protocol Group were represented.

The meeting comes in the same week that the UK Government's £23 million Seafood Disruption Support Scheme opened for applications to businesses that suffered a financial loss because of delays related to the export of fresh or live fish and shellfish to the EU during January 2021.

This is in addition to the £100 million fund announced by the Prime Minister in December to help modernise fishing fleets and the fish processing industry and is on top of the £32 million that will replace EU funding this year.

Support provided to the industry includes:

- Dialogue has already delivered swift solutions to a number of problems that caused difficulties for the industry, including – but not limited to – computer system glitches.
- Issuing clear guidance on the required IT forms to stakeholder representative groups, hauliers and businesses.
- Frequent meetings with businesses to understand and address issues as they arise.
- Working closely with individual businesses to help them get used to the new procedures required to ensure that errors or problems are tackled early.
- UK Government has stood up extra physical resources to support certification in a Scottish export hub.
- The UK Government has provided specialist certifiers to support Food Standards Scotland and DFDS.
- Working with French authorities to ensure that minor administrative issues associated with EHCs have not prevented goods from entering the market and with the EU Commission to help member states adopt consistent approaches.
- Providing extensive guidance as part of a range of measures to help the industry meet new export requirements, including training, regular engagement and weekly bulletins.