

Ministear airson na h-Àrainneachd agus Atharrachadh Aimsir
Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Paul Wheelhouse BPA/MSP

F/T: 0845 774 1741
E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk



Rob Gibson MSP
Convenor
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP



7 January 2014

Dear Rob

I am writing to update the Committee on the Environment Council which I attended on 13 December. The Council adopted conclusions on a first reading agreement on proposals on emissions from maritime transport and on invasive alien species. The Council received an update on the Outcome of the 19th UNFCCC COP, on EU ETS/Aviation, and on proposals on Plastic Carrier Bags.

In addition to the formal Council business I was also able to have a number of bilateral discussions with other Ministers. In particular I had the opportunity to meet with a senior Swedish government official which focussed heavily on climate change issues and future potential opportunities for collaborative working. I also had the opportunity to spend time with the Welsh Government's Minister for Natural Resources and Food, Alun Davies. This was a good opportunity to discuss a number of issues of mutual interest and the first time I had met him since he acquired responsibility earlier this year for the whole of the Welsh Government's environment portfolio. In the margins of Council business I had separate discussions with both of the UK Secretaries of State attending, Ed Davey and Owen Paterson.

Detail

Emissions from Maritime Transport

The Commission introduced a dossier for Regulation on the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification of Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Maritime Transport. The majority of Member States agreed that the international measure was the main objective and that the scope of covering ships over 5000 Gross Tonnage (GT) and not covering gases other than CO2 was appropriate. There was some general concern raised over the overly burdensome approach of requiring all ships, including those conducting short-sea shipping, to report on a per voyage basis.

Invasive Alien Species

The Commission introduced its proposal on tackling invasive alien species (IAS). They highlighted their intention to focus only on species non-native to the EU as they claimed these were responsible for 85% of damage caused by IAS and would also avoid trade and single market issues. Similarly, they were also against the concept of a single list with derogations. The Commission wanted to conclude negotiations ahead of 2015 to feed into the review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and to help with making progress towards the Convention of Biological Diversity targets.

Most Member States strongly supported regional cooperation on various elements of the proposal such as developing pathway action plans. Some Member States highlighted the problem of insufficient funding for implementing the proposal. The Commission noted this but confirmed that any funding would need to come only from existing instruments. The Presidency noted that there was universal support for an EU system to tackle IAS and concluded that there was a need to revise the principles to devise the list of species and that regional cooperation was important and would help to reduce costs of implementation.

Outcome of the 19th Session of the Conference of The Parties to the UN Framework Convention On Climate Change (COP 19)

Poland as Presidency of COP19 introduced its summary, claiming that the outcome of the Ad-hoc working group on the Durban Platform (ADP) meant that the EU had over a year now in which to prepare its contribution for the COP 21 summit in Paris in 2015. The Commission gave an alternative perspective, highlighting the impact that the EU had had on finance and loss and damage, and on the agreement on the ADP. The Commission also called for more outreach from Ministers and Foreign Services, in particular to the progressive developing countries that had worked with the EU in Durban in 2011. Germany, France, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden and the UK all pushed back on the Polish interpretation of the timeline for developing the EU's contribution, emphasising the importance of the March Council in enabling the EU to show leadership, and of the June Ministerial meeting in making progress on pre-2020 mitigation ambition.

Proposed Directive to Address the Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC) Impacts Of Biofuels

The Presidency gave an update on the failure to reach agreement in the Energy Council on 12 December on the proposed Directive to address the indirect land use change (ILUC) impacts of biofuels. Greece confirmed its willingness to try and take the dossier forward under its Presidency.

EU ETS/Aviation

The Presidency gave an update on the state of play and way forward on EU/ETS Aviation. The Commission argued strongly for its proposal to include flights within the airspace of the EU in the emissions trading system from 2014, and emphasised the importance of enforcement by Member States of whatever scope was agreed through the co-decision process. France, the UK, Germany and Finland all argued that the Commission's proposal did not reflect the political nature of the issue, and the importance of making progress in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on a global solution to tackling CO2 emissions from aviation.

Proposal for a Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste to Reduce the Consumption of Lightweight Plastic Carrier Bags

The Commission introduced its new proposal on plastic bags which had been adopted in response to calls from the Council, most notably the Environment Council of March 2011, and in response to the huge reaction they had to their public consultation on the issue. Luxembourg, Belgium, Austria, Ireland, Italy and Germany all expressed support for the Commission proposal but also took the opportunity to highlight the progress they had already made through national measures to reduce carrier bag use. All wanted this progress to be taken into account. Germany, France and Belgium also believed the proposal could have gone further by for example proposing an EU wide reduction target. The UK welcomed the flexibility included in the Commission proposal and highlighted progress made nationally in reducing carrier bag use. The UK said it was keen to work together with other Member States and the Commission to develop a truly biodegradable plastic bag.

Work Programme of The Incoming Presidency

Greece set out the work programme for its Presidency. They would seek agreement on the following proposals: ETS Aviation and shipment of waste, the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein (CITES), and if the Lithuanians did not manage to, Fluorinated Gases. They also aimed to make progress on the air quality and management of waste packages (yet to be adopted by the Commission), Kyoto, inspections, access to justice. On the non-legislative side, they would be preparing work for the following international meetings: The twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the post 2015 development agenda with a view to discussions in Nairobi next year.

I am copy this letter to Christina McKelvie, Convener European and External Relations Committee for information.

Kindest regards



PAUL WHEELHOUSE