

Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform
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Convener
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The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Rob

ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL: 4 MARCH 2016

This note is to let you know the main outcomes of the EU Environment Council which I attended in Brussels on 4 March 2016.

I was especially keen to have had the opportunity to take part in the exchange of views on the follow up to the Paris Agreement on climate change. I highlighted the importance of maintaining the EU's leadership on climate change in a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete.

The timing of the Council's afternoon discussion on the EU Circular Economy Package was especially relevant given the publication on the 23 February of Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy, Making Things Last. The launch of our strategy was supported by Commissioner Karmenu Vella on a visit to Edinburgh.

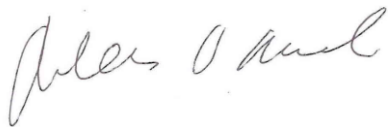
I briefly met Commissioner Vella in the margins of the Council and held a bilateral with the Slovak State Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, where I emphasised Scotland's determination to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a more circular economy.

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I am copying this letter to the Convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for information.

Kind regards



AILEEN MCLEOD

ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL REPORT: 4 MARCH 2016

SUMMARY

Scotland's Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod, attended EU Environment Council on 4 March. The Council discussed follow up to the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the Commission's Circular Economy Package. This provided an opportunity to continue to demonstrate Scotland's ambition on addressing climate change domestically and internationally, and highlight Scotland's recently published Circular Economy Strategy, Making Things Last.

Alongside the formal Council agenda, Dr McLeod met with the State Secretary in the Slovakian Ministry of the Environment to discuss their forthcoming Presidency of the EU. Dr McLeod emphasised Scotland's positive vision for the EU and our commitment to the transition to a circular economy, a number of areas were identified for possible collaboration during the Slovakian EU Presidency. The Minister later met with Commissioner for Energy and Climate Change, Miguel Arias Cañete where she voiced Scotland's strong support for raising collective mitigation ambition within the Paris framework before 2020.

KEY OUTCOMES

Follow-Up to COP 21 – Climate Change

1. The Council held a policy debate on follow-up to the Paris Agreement and its implications for EU climate policy. Ministers highlighted the need to maintain momentum and focus on implementation. The Commission's Communication assessing the implications of the agreement was welcomed. The UK made clear that although they welcome the current deal, they do not consider the current level of commitments internationally are ambitious enough to achieve a below 2⁰C global goal.
2. Dr McLeod, worked with the UK Delegation to strengthen the language in the UK intervention on the matter of ambition, and to clearly support the Presidency's view that Member states need to be well prepared to contribute to EU input to the special report in 2018 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the implications of the Paris Agreement 1.5°C goal, the 2018 facilitative dialogue to take stock of collective global efforts, and the development of the EU's long-term, mid-century low emissions strategy due by 2020.

Circular Economy Strategy

3. Ministers welcomed the Commission's Circular Economy Package published in December 2015, and identified a need for action at all levels – EU, National and Local – to make the Circular Economy a reality. This debate comes just two weeks after Scotland launched its own Circular Economy Strategy, Making Things Last, which was highlighted to Ministers in the UK intervention.
4. Ministers discussed which of the actions identified by the Commission are most important from an environment perspective, there was significant interest in tackling the early stages of product lifecycles and green public procurement. Investing in

innovation and emphasising synergies with other policies in ways which support competitiveness, particularly for SMEs, were also widely supported by different Member States. The Council will continue to monitor progress on the transition to a circular economy, and Member States are keen to regularly exchange good practices.

European Semester – the contribution of environment to jobs and growth

5. The Council discussed the annual European Semester, a tool for economic policy coordination, and the role of environment and climate policies in jobs and growth. This discussions occurs annually in line with other similar exchanges in most Council formations. As in previous years Environment Ministers emphasised that there is an important contribution to jobs to be made from environment policies. This year Ministers particularly highlighted the transition to a Circular Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Endocrine Disruptors

6. The Council adopted a statement regarding a recent ruling regarding endocrine disruptors (chemicals that interfere with the hormonal system). The Court of Justice of the EU considered that the Commission failed to specify in due time scientific criteria for these substances. The statement by the Council underlined the importance of the Commission taking urgent action to comply with their legal obligations and prevent any further delay in developing science based criteria for endocrine disruptors.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Energy Transition

7. The Austrian delegation tabled a paper which was taken as part of the debate on follow up to the Paris Agreement. The Austrians wished to promote discussion across EU partners on renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Implementing the 7th Environment Action Programme

8. In response to a Belgian AOB request the Commission updated delegations on the actions it is taking and have planned as part of the implementation of the 7th Environmental Action Programme's nine priority objectives.

Minamata Package – Mercury

9. The Commission presented to Ministers the Minamata Convention package on mercury, including a proposal for a regulation and a proposed Council decision.

Real Driving Emissions

10. At the request of the French delegation the Commission provided an update on the state of play with regard to real driving emissions tests.

EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking

11. The Commission provided an overview of its recently published Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking. The Action Plan contains a number of proposals on enhanced enforcement within the EU, and is focused on the international trade of illegal items such as raw ivory and illegal hunting trophies.

Innovation Deals

12. At the end of the day the Commission presented an information note on Innovation Deals, voluntary agreements between innovators, national/regional/local authorities and the Commission to identify and address EU regulatory barriers to better achieving policy objectives. It is based on the Green Deal Programme in the Netherlands, and is part of the EU's better regulation agenda.

The next Environment Council will be held in Luxembourg on the 20 June 2016.