

George Eustice MP  
Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food  
Nobel House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

7 February 2017

Dear Minister of State

**Withdrawal of attendance at the meeting of the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee – 9 February 2017**

I am extremely disappointed that you have withdrawn from your appearance before the Committee at such short notice.

The Committee has sought to engage with UK Ministers throughout its inquiry into the future of agricultural and rural policies in Wales. Invitations to attend meetings have been extended to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and yourself. In doing so, the Committee has been extremely flexible in trying to accommodate your attendance, by offering several potential meeting dates and the possibility of a video conference.

The Secretary of State rejected the Committee's invitation and agreed, instead, to meet me as Chair of the Committee. The Secretary of State subsequently cancelled that meeting at short notice.



You agreed to attend a meeting of the Committee. However, you have now notified me, two days before the meeting is due to take place, that you will not attend.

You will understand that the apparent refusal of UK Ministers to engage with the Assembly's lead Committee on agricultural policy is a matter of grave concern.

Given the importance of agricultural and farming policy in Wales, it is vital that Assembly Members and the people of Wales hear directly from Ministers in the UK Government. Furthermore, ensuring that future agricultural policy is a success in Wales and at a UK level will depend heavily on cooperation and mutual respect between the Assembly and the UK Government. The Committee's recent experience in trying to engage with UK Ministers brings into doubt the UK Government's commitment to that spirit of cooperation and respect.

I note that the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, in answer to a parliamentary question, said that:

*".....no powers existing in the devolved Administrations will come back [to Westminster], but there will be powers coming from the European Union and we will have to decide where they most properly land, whether that is Westminster, Holyrood or wherever."*

Agricultural policy is devolved. Leaving the European Union will not result in the transfer of any devolved powers to the UK Government. It will result only in a removal of EU restrictions on the exercise of those devolved powers. The position expressed by the Secretary of State demonstrates a misunderstanding that this Committee wishes to address with relevant UK Ministers as a matter of urgency.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the UK Government's Devolution Guidance Note, paragraph 12 of which states that:

*"On all occasions, and whatever the intention as regards attendance, Ministers and their officials should deal with devolved Committees with the same courtesy, respect and promptness as they would use in dealing with Westminster Select*



*Committees. The Government wishes the devolved arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to continue operating effectively within the new constitutional frameworks that have been provided. Behaving in the proper way towards the devolved legislatures' Committees is one way of achieving this aim."*

I expect, as a matter of courtesy and respect to the Committee and to the Assembly, that you will agree to attend a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February or Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March, the only remaining sessions at which we can take evidence for this inquiry.

Yours Sincerely



Mark Reckless AM

**Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs**

