



HOUSE OF LORDS

Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee

House of Lords

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The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham St
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Dear George,

Thank you for the summaries of the Plant Health Common Framework, Zootechnics Common Framework and the Plant Varieties and Seeds Framework which were considered by the Committee on 29 June, and your letter of the 25 June.

I would like to confirm the Committee's intention to scrutinise these frameworks. However, given the uncertainty of when the Provisional Frameworks will be published, and how many other frameworks might be published at the same time, we reserve the right to extend our scrutiny beyond 21 sitting days if required.

The Plant Varieties and Seeds Framework Summary is a detailed and helpful document which will help our Committee prepare for scrutiny of the provisional framework. We would particularly like to call attention to Annex C of the summary and to the annex on stakeholder consultation in your 25 June letter, which provides details of stakeholder feedback on the Food Compositional Standards and Labelling framework. These set a good standard which we would like to see replicated consistently across all frameworks from your department.

The other two summaries are of a substantially lower standard. These summaries are outdated with the Zootech Framework Summary referring to the Internal Market Bill and failing to acknowledge the completion of the Trade and Cooperation agreement with the EU. We are deeply concerned by the inconsistent quality across the DEFRA framework summaries and seek assurance that this does not reflect a lack of commitment in the department to the Common Frameworks programme. In addition, there are a few specific areas where we would welcome additional clarity before receiving the Provisional Frameworks.

Plant Health

The Plant Health Framework Summary's diagram of the governance structure for the framework includes four different groups but the Summary itself only explains two in detail. Could you provide information on the membership and function of the Defra-DA Policy Working Group and the PH Service Operational Monitoring Group? How do these two groups relate to the UK National Plant Protection Organisation and the UK Plant Health Risk Group? Which parts of the Framework are the Working Group and the Monitoring Group responsible for? How often do they meet?

The Plant Health Framework Summary mentions that the Plant Health Advisory Forum and the Tree Health Policy Group were consulted in the preparation of this framework. Would you be willing to provide details of the membership of these two groups and a summary of any comments they had on the framework?

Zootechnics

We are concerned by the lack of detail in the Zootechnics Framework Summary. It is especially concerning for a Framework Summary to not mention the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland when there is a clear interaction with that framework. Given the overlap with the Protocol, how will this affect Northern Ireland's participation in the Zootechnics Framework?

The Framework Summary is also missing basic information on how the Framework will operate. What is the role of the Zootech Working Group? How will the Risk Assessment mentioned in the Summary function? Will there be a single UK-wide assessment process or will there be different processes for each administration following a common form? Will there be a senior official level group overseeing policy work in this area? How often will this framework be reviewed?

Food Compositional Standards and Labelling

In your letter you state that where disputes occur on issues that were not part of retained EU legislation "any disagreement or dispute would need to be pursued through other channels, as they are now". What other channels are you referring to? How do they differ from the Common Frameworks dispute mechanism? Why should the best practice of the Common Frameworks dispute mechanisms not be used more widely?

We look forward to receiving your response within 10 working days.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Andrews
Chair of the Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee