

Joint statement from First Ministers of Wales and Scotland in reaction to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill

“This week began with the Prime Minister calling for a constructive and collaborative approach from those outside Whitehall to help get Brexit right. Today’s publication of The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is the first test as to whether the UK government is serious about such an approach. It is a test it has failed utterly.

“We have repeatedly tried to engage with the UK government on these matters, and have put forward constructive proposals about how we can deliver an outcome which will protect the interests of all the nations in the UK, safeguard our economies and respect devolution.

“Regrettably, the bill does not do this. Instead, it is a naked power-grab, an attack on the founding principles of devolution and could destabilise our economies.

“Our 2 governments – and the UK government – agree we need a functioning set of laws across the UK after withdrawal from the EU. We also recognise that common frameworks to replace EU laws across the UK may be needed in some areas. But the way to achieve these aims is through negotiation and agreement, not imposition. It must be done in a way which respects the hard-won devolution settlements.

“The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill does not return powers from the EU to the devolved administrations, as promised. It returns them solely to the UK government and Parliament, and imposes new restrictions on the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales.

“On that basis, the Scottish and Welsh Governments cannot recommend that legislative consent is given to the bill as it currently stands.

“The bill lifts from the UK government and Parliament the requirement to comply with EU law, but does the opposite for the devolved legislatures: it imposes a new set of strict restrictions. These new restrictions make no sense in the context of the UK leaving the EU.

“We have explained these points to the UK government and have set out what we consider to be a constructive way forward in the spirit of co-operation, based on the involvement of, and respect for,

devolved institutions.

“Unfortunately, the conversation has been entirely one-sided. We remain open to these discussions, and look forward to coming to an agreed solution between the governments of these islands.”