

SNP leant on M&S over country labelling row

16 May 2018



SNP government officials pressured Marks and Spencer amid a “Union Jackery” row over food and drink labelling, it has emerged.

Nationalists were furious when the retailer listed whisky and Scottish gin under the “United Kingdom” section of their website.

And after this was reported by a pro-independence publication, the SNP government immediately contacted M&S to demand an explanation.

Documents obtained under Freedom of Information by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed rural affairs secretary Fergus Ewing was then briefed on the conversation with M&S.

He was told by officials: “Scottish Government officials spoke to M&S to seek clarity on the situation with regard to the status of these products on their website. M&S urgently investigated this and reverted back confirming that this was indeed an error which they immediately rectified and sent out a tweet apologising for their error.”

After M&S agreed to back down, the Scottish Government official then asked: “Do you guys plan to send any tweets (or something) to clarify the situation? Just wondering as I’m sure if you did Mr Ewing would respond positively.”

The FoI response also reveals First Minister Nicola Sturgeon received similar briefings over Tesco’s decision to sell Scottish strawberries under a Union Flag logo in 2016.

Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:

“There’s not a person in the world who doesn’t know whisky is Scottish.

“But for the SNP to actively pressure a leading retailer in this way is petty and, frankly, a waste of public resources.

“It shows just how parochial the SNP government is, that it would sooner berate businesses for daring to refer to the UK, than actually help them create jobs and grow the economy.

“Instead of obsessing about Saltires and pandering to the extreme elements of the Yes movement, the SNP government should be getting on with representing the whole country.”