



The Rt. Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square
London, SW1P 3JR

Friday 27 May 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

UK position in the current NEC Directive negotiations

As organisations working to protect the health of people and the environment, we are concerned about the UK Government's reported position in the current negotiations on crucial new EU air pollution legislation. The NEC¹ Directive is essential to deliver much needed reductions in air pollution across the EU but it is in danger of being weakened, delayed and even blocked by the government's actions.

There is no doubt about the need to reduce air pollution across the UK. People's health is being harmed and lives cut short. Air pollution causes the equivalent of at least 40,000 premature deaths every year in the UK. It stunts the growth of children's lungs and there is evidence that it can affect their ability to learn. Air pollution harms our natural environment through eutrophication and acidification and contributes to climate change.

Air pollution does not respect national borders. Up to half² of the UK's PM_{2.5}, which causes heart attacks and exacerbates breathing problems, originates from sources outside our national borders. During smog events these can be responsible for 80%³ of air pollution levels. Therefore, cleaning up the UK's air requires the government to take action both at home and in Europe.

The NEC Directive is the main tool to address this transboundary air pollution.⁴ We are therefore deeply concerned that the UK is seeking to weaken it⁵ by demanding lower targets and supporting "flexibilities" – legal loopholes that would allow member states to escape their legal responsibilities to cut emissions.⁶ This undermines the government's efforts to meet legal limits and would result in an additional 11,000 early deaths in the UK alone by 2030.⁷

By lobbying to reduce our own commitments other large member states are encouraged to do the same, leading to additional pollution that will ultimately harm people in the UK. This

¹ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants and amending Directive 2003/35/EC

² Defra, May 2016, "Being part of the EU is better for the: Environment"

³ King's College London evidence in [Environmental Audit Committee, 2011, "Air quality: A Follow up report. Ninth Report of Session 2010-12"](#)

⁴ [EEB, April 2015, "NGO recommendations on the revision of the NEC directive following the publication of the rapporteur's draft report"](#)

⁵ In correspondence to the Healthy Air Campaign dated 30th March 2016, the Minister Rory Stewart MP confirmed the UK Government's support for the [European Council's 'General Approach'](#). This has been [criticised](#) by the NGO community for seeking to weaken the impacts of the legislation.

⁶ [EEB, January 2016, "Flexibilities in the National Emission Ceilings \(NEC\) Directive: undermining effective law making"](#)

⁷ [EEB, 2016, "Briefing: New analysis shows impacts of Member States' push to weaken air quality laws"](#)

also risks delaying or even preventing the adoption of legislation that could otherwise help prevent thousands of early deaths in the UK and across Europe.

We therefore call upon the UK Government to:

1. **Show greater ambition** in agreeing to targets to reduce emissions of harmful pollutants.
2. **Support legally binding targets for 2025** to prioritise early action to tackle air pollution; waiting until 2030 will mean more people die early unnecessarily.
3. **Agree to methane targets** in order to reduce ground-level ozone, which is seriously harmful to human health.
4. **Reject “flexibilities”** that will weaken the legislation.

Your government currently stands at a crossroads, where it could take the historic decision to secure a cleaner and healthier future for everyone or to give in to industry lobbying. We hope that you will stand up for our right to breathe clean air and act as a leader to secure the most ambitious outcome from these EU negotiations.

We would be grateful if you could let us know your thoughts on this and thank you in advance for your support.

Yours sincerely,



CC: Rory Stewart MP

For further information about this letter please contact:

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