



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Iain Stewart MP
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Dear Iain,

Thank you for your email of 18 June on behalf of your constituents about the Environment Bill. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Improving air quality is a top priority and, especially during these unprecedented times, we are continuing to take robust and comprehensive action to improve air quality in the UK and minimise public health impacts. The green recovery is an opportunity to ensure that decarbonisation and air quality benefits are aligned, and we will prioritise policies and actions that maximise co-benefits.

The Government is taking a proactive approach to understand the possible links between air quality and COVID-19. A report by the Air Quality Expert Group on findings from a Call for Evidence on possible links between air quality and COVID-19 was published on 1 July 2020.

The Environment Bill has passed Commons stages and is now in the House of Lords for consideration. Royal Assent is expected in the autumn. The Bill establishes a legally binding duty to set a target for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), in addition to a further long-term air quality target. A policy paper published in August 2020 outlined our proposed objectives for air quality targets – to reduce the annual mean level of PM_{2.5} in ambient air and reduce population exposure to PM_{2.5} in the long term. This dual-target approach to PM_{2.5} will tackle the highest concentrations and ensure continuous improvement across the country.

The Government will follow an evidence-based process to set these air quality targets, and will consider the World Health Organization's (WHO) annual mean guideline level for PM_{2.5} when setting the target, alongside independent expert advice, evidence and analysis on a diversity of factors. Stakeholders, Parliament and the public will have the opportunity to comment on, and input into, the process of developing these targets.

The WHO's Air Quality Guidelines are intended to inform the setting of air quality standards and are not ready-made targets for adoption. The WHO itself does not expect any country to simply adopt its guidelines without first undertaking the steps we plan to take before setting targets, including a fully costed analysis and developing a pathway to achieving the targets.

In parallel, we began phasing out the sale of house coal and small volumes of wet wood for domestic burning from 1 May 2021 and have recently closed a consultation on reducing ammonia emissions from urea fertilisers. Taking these actions and others will deliver health benefits and create a cleaner and healthier environment for all. Alongside this, we are providing people with the information they need to reduce their exposure and minimise health impacts.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact us about this important issue.



REBECCA POW MP