



Jo Churchill MP
Minister for Agri-Innovation and Climate Adaptation
Department for Energy, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

27 June 2022

Dear Minister

Re: consultation on environmental targets

We are writing to you as senior health leaders and those with lived experience to urge the Department to be more ambitious in setting clean air targets and commit to reducing pollution from the toxic fine particulate matter $PM_{2.5}$ to $10\mu g m^{-3}$ by 2030.

Air quality is a significant and growing public health issue. In 2016, a joint report from the Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health estimated that the equivalent of 40,000 deaths is attributable to outdoor air pollution alone every year in the UK. In December 2020, following the inquest into the death of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, air pollution exposure was listed as a cause of death for the first time in the UK.

We welcome that the government is setting clean air targets under the Environment Act. It is a critical chance to reduce the health impact of toxic air and end the unequal impact of air pollution on vulnerable groups. But the targets currently proposed by government to reduce one of the most harmful pollutants - $PM_{2.5}$ - by 2040 does not go far enough. Given that the government's own analysis shows that reaching $11\mu g m^{-3}$ of $PM_{2.5}$ by 2030 is likely to be achievable in most policy scenarios under consideration, waiting until 2040 falls far short of the level of ambition required to improve health and save lives.

The consultation closing today is an opportunity for the UK to become a world leader in reducing air pollution and to set robust limits that will better protect health. As you will be all too aware, breathing air polluted with fine particulate matter $PM_{2.5}$ leads not only to increased risk of asthma attacks, but can trigger heart attacks and strokes. It exacerbates respiratory illnesses, such as COPD, and can stunt the lung growth of children which

means they run a higher risk of developing chronic illnesses as they grow. It is a major driver of health inequalities, with the most deprived UK communities most likely to live in polluted areas. We continue to learn more about air pollution and its health and wider environmental effects every day. We must be prepared to take increasingly ambitious action to mitigate its impacts on health.

Without more ambitious targets under the Environment Act, poor air quality will continue to be a significant invisible public health crisis that leads to premature deaths and more years lived in ill-health. We urge you to be more ambitious and bring forward the target date to reduce PM2.5 to 10 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ by 2030.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Sir Andrew Goddard, President, Royal College of Physicians.

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, special adviser on air quality, Royal College of Physicians.

Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, founder, Ella Roberta Foundation.

Dr Katherine Henderson, President, Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

Dr Adrian James, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Dr Camilla Kingdon, President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

Professor Martin Marshall, President, Royal College of General Practitioners.

Dr Eddie Morris, President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Professor Neil Mortensen, President, Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Professor Maggie Rae, President, Faculty of Public Health.

Dr Richard Smith, Chair, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC).

Dr David Strain, Chair, BMA Board of Science.

Sarah Woolnough, CEO, Asthma + Lung UK.

CC. Maggie Throup MP, Minister for Vaccines and Public Health