

05 September 2024

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

Safeguarding water and air quality through Environmental Health

I am writing to you on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), the foremost professional body for environmental health practitioners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, representing a diverse and skilled membership of over 7,500 individuals across various sectors.

At CIEH, we are united with Defra in our commitment to improving and protecting the environment. As an organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting health, wellbeing, and the environment, CIEH looks forward to working closely with your administration to take a holistic approach to safeguard public and environmental health.

We wholeheartedly agree that our environment is at crisis point and were pleased to hear you set out your [five core priorities](#) to tackle this. Crucially, these commitments not only align closely with our [2024 manifesto asks](#), but will centrally be delivered by environmental health professionals.

Regarding your pledge to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas, we welcome the Water (Special Measures) Bill as an important first step to improve water quality by strengthening Ofwat's power to drive accountable actions from water companies. We are pleased that the Government acknowledges that further legislation will be needed to improve water quality and would urge for this to include an improvement of the UK's sewage treatment and drainage infrastructure. Importantly, there is an urgent need to tackle the immediate public health crisis posed by sewage pollution. To that end CIEH are calling on Defra to take the following action:

- To **guarantee enforcement** of new and existing regulations.
- To provide **greater transparency** around both the scale and extent of sewage pollution, and to issue public guidance.

- To **immediately tackle the highest risk pollution events** into bathing waters and Sites of Special Scientific interest.

CIEH also welcome Defra's [announcement](#) to conduct a rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). Crucially, as we outlined in our engagement with Ruth Jones MP as part of her previous role as Shadow Minister for Environmental Protection, current Air Quality targets don't go far enough to tackle what is the greatest environmental threat to the public, contributing to almost 43,000 premature deaths each year. As part of the outcomes of this review, we would urge for refreshed Air Quality targets that aim to reduce the concentration of PM_{2.5} to 10µg/m³ by 2030, in line with the World Health Organisation's Air Quality Guidelines, and to be met with a holistic framework for resourcing local authorities to ensure their delivery.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you and your team how environmental health can provide a holistic and integrated way to tackle each of Defra's core priorities and ensuring the UK's water and air pollution is urgently addressed. My colleague Ciaran Donaghy will contact your office to see if we can find a mutually convenient date.

Yours sincerely,

Fran McCloskey

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'F' and 'M' in a stylized, cursive font.

Chief Executive Officer
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

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