



The Rt Hon George Eustice
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Secretary of State,

We, a broad alliance of UK environmental groups, are writing to urge the UK Government to act decisively and swiftly to protect the health of UK citizens, as well as our biodiversity and climate, from the damaging effects of ammonia emissions from agriculture and other sources.

This is a serious matter given that statistics released on 14 February show that Government has missed its 2020 ammonia emissions reduction target by 7%, achieving only 20.81kt of the required 22.40kt reduction. Legally binding targets were set in 2016, requiring the UK to reduce ammonia emissions by 8% by 2020 and 16% by 2030 – both compared to 2005 levels. Despite this, reductions in ammonia emissions have stalled over recent years, increasing between 2013 and 2017, and still remain a long way off the 2030 target, without a clear plan of action to deliver the further improvements necessary.

The statistics confirm the need for new regulation and a proactive and integrated approach to reduce ammonia emissions from farming, which is the largest source of this pollutant. Whilst the Government's 2019 Clean Air Strategy set out ambition to produce new regulation to reduce emissions from agriculture, three years on from the strategy's publication, none of these actions have been delivered.

As you will be aware, ammonia is a significant contributor to secondary fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), and this is a particularly damaging pollutant to human health. Action must be taken not only to help meet World Health Organization recommendations, but also because health experts tell us there is no safe level for this pollutant. The UK Government has so far relied heavily on voluntary action by the farming industry and the lack of regulation poses a significant question of fairness for the many farmers who already invest in pollution controls.

In addition to the significant threats posed to human health, ammonia pollution is also highly damaging to wildlife and our natural environment, with concentrations exceeding critical levels across more than 80% of England's land. The health and resilience of our most

important wildlife habitats has already been compromised by this pollutant; all woodlands and the vast majority of heathland and calcareous grassland exceed the critical load for nutrient nitrogen deposition from air pollution. This nitrogen acts as a fertiliser, driving unnaturally nutrient-rich conditions which many vital species cannot tolerate.

In order to comply with its existing legal duties and protect the health of people, rural communities and our critical wildlife, we must see the UK Government act with speed to urgently and specifically reduce ammonia emissions, including by delivering:

- **More effective regulation to better manage ammonia emissions from farming**, including commitments under the Clean Air Strategy 2019 to introduce new rules to reduce emissions from urea-based fertilisers, manure, slurry and digestate, and intensive poultry, livestock and dairy housing;
- an **improved National Air Pollution Control Programme**, setting out further action necessary to secure compliance with the UK's 2020 emission reduction targets as quickly as possible and ensure the UK is on track to comply with its 2030 commitments. The Secretary of State is under a legal requirement to produce a revised Programme by September 2022 at the very latest; and
- an update of the **UK Air Quality Strategy 2007**, setting out how action by local authorities will contribute to these goals, including through the planning system.

Although farm manures and fertilisers are the main sources of ammonia gases, they are also key sources of other forms of nitrogen pollution - nitrates leaching into our rivers and streams, and emissions of nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas. This means that **an integrated approach to reducing all forms of nitrogen pollution through regulation, incentives and advice is essential** to meet legal targets and duties across clean air & water, public health, net zero and nature's recovery.

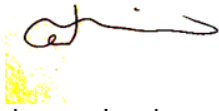
We call on you to seize this moment to take a fresh, holistic and full-cycle approach to reducing the impacts of our overuse and waste of nitrogen. This includes a full assessment of nitrogen's sources, flows and impacts and mechanisms to bring pollution from all forms of nitrogen within safe environmental and health limits, including ammonia, nitrogen oxides (NO_x), nitrates and nitrous oxides.

Achieving the above goals will also require coherence with other policies including:

- **new targets for air quality and biodiversity** for England by October, as required by the Environment Act 2021, and clear pathways to deliver these;
- review and refresh of the **25 Year Environment Plan** by 31 January 2023 in light of those targets;
- continued rollout of **Environmental Land Management, Catchment Sensitive Farming and other advice and incentives to support farmers** to go above and beyond compliance with regulation;
- commitment to longer term financial support and stronger powers for the recently-enlarged Environment Agency Area Land & Water teams, given that the Government itself has identified enforcement as vital where advice and incentives alone prove insufficient.

We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss these important and pressing matters.

Kind regards,



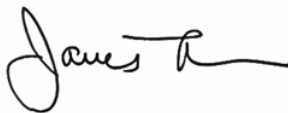
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