

The Right Honourable Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

29 October 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

As the UK Presidency of COP26 reaches its crucial stages on Sunday 31st October, we believe that the next 2 weeks will be the most important part of your political career. The evidence is stark and clear. Without radical change over the next decade then the chances of avoiding runaway climate change are extremely slim.

Along with many other public health organisations, we believe that climate change is the greatest public health challenge that the world may have ever faced. It is estimated by the World Health Organisation that there are, already, over 150,000 deaths each year as a result of climate changes.¹ And failure to lay the global foundations at these vital talks over the next fortnight would see that figure massively escalate through both direct impacts of extreme weather but also the indirect impacts that are likely to arise such as changes in the patterns of disease vectors famines, mass population shifts, drought and ultimately conflicts.

Whilst the UK has brought leadership through, for example, climate legislation and the establishment of a UK Climate Change Committee; progress on renewable energy; and the phasing out of fossil fuel powered vehicles, there are also recent decisions which cause concern.

The trade deals, for example, that have recently been agreed with Australia and New Zealand arguably threaten the sustainability and viability of our Agriculture and food industries on these islands and threaten the significant carbon transition that must happen within this sector. Lord Deben, Chair of the UK Climate Change Committee said at a Conference in Northern Ireland only this past week that *“the Government needs to go back on overseas trade deals”* as farmers in the UK simply cannot achieve what they must in terms of carbon reduction from the sector with that kind of competition from countries who have much poorer environmental and animal welfare standards.

¹ <https://www.who.int/heli/risks/climate/climatechange/en/>



The Government's recent vote to reject amendments to the environment bill committing the UK to WHO recommended levels of PM 2.5 is disappointing and concerning at two levels. The first simply because of the potential public health implications of failing to meet WHO standards. But the second connected with the rationale given by Zac Goldsmith to the House of Lords setting out the government's rationale for opposing the proposed amendments. Mr Goldsmith said, *"to achieve a level such as 10 micrograms in our cities would require fundamental changes in how we live our lives"*. He cites changes to farming practices, discontinuing wood burning and restricting traffic miles travelled. Yet the simple facts are that there will have to be fundamental changes to the way we all live our lives if we are to meet the challenges of preventing catastrophic climate change. It is a matter of some concern if the government does not see that which Mr Goldman's comments suggest it does not?

And finally, even though a key recommendation of a cross government working group was investment in environmental health apprenticeships to address the very real capacity issues in this critical part of the public health workforce, there was a complete absence of any investment in any aspects of public health workforce in the recent budget. This is not only extremely disappointing, but we believe will have consequences for health protection further down the line.

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs), contrary to some perceptions, are not just "regulators". They work with and support businesses, communities, and individuals in improving health and wellbeing for all. They have made, and continue to make, a very significant contribution to health protection throughout this pandemic. And they already play a significant role in meeting the challenges that the road to net zero presents. But this workforce requires support and investment from government.

Therefore, in light of all the above and as we enter this critical phase of COP26 we would urge the Prime Minister and the UK Government to:

- ensure that the UK plays its full part in leading in a bold, innovative, and transformative way what we hope history will judge as the point where world leaders responded to the challenge and agreed a roadmap for the next decades that avoided the catastrophe towards which we are currently headed.
- reconsider the impact that recent trade deals will have on our efforts to reach net zero as well as the impact of such deals on public health.
- reconsider its decision to not invest in the environmental and public health workforce to provide the UK with some of the critical skills and competencies that it will need for the future in meeting the challenges ahead.



CIEH will continue to work to support not only our members, but constructively challenge policy makers around this critical issue. We will also continue to build on our own organisational credentials in this space through offering what is, we believe, one of the UKs most sustainable conference and events venues in London, as well as our own organisational commitments reflected in our environmental policy.

We wish you well for the forthcoming negotiations and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this letter once those negotiations have concluded.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive

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