

To:

George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

24 February 2020

Dear Secretaries of State,

Re: Urgent Need for PFAS / Forever Chemicals Regulation

In view of current scientific evidence and risk assessments carried out by many countries, we, as concerned citizens, experts and filmmakers, urge the UK Government to take immediate action towards restricting Per and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in the UK.

Specifically, we call on the Government to introduce comprehensive legislation restricting the use of all PFAS in paper and board food packaging.

This action is necessary to protect people and the environment. Denmark has already committed to banning PFAS in paper and cardboard food packaging from July 2020, and the Netherlands are proposing a complete phase-out of all non-essential PFAS across the EU.

Denmark's biggest supermarket, Co-op, has already removed PFAS from all food packaging.¹ Denmark's Food Minister Mogens Jensen has said: "I do not want to accept the risk of harmful fluorinated substances (PFAS) migrating from the packaging and into our food. These substances represent such a health problem that we can no longer wait for the EU."

Concern over PFAS pollution is significantly increasing. As revealed in the new film *Dark Waters*, PFAS pollution is impacting people and wildlife worldwide. PFAS are persistent. These "forever chemicals" can last for thousands of years in the environment and can build up in our bodies and the bodies of our wildlife.

PFAS are a UK problem

PFAS are present in our soils, seas and rivers. Otters, seabirds, fish and marine mammals are all now contaminated by PFAS. **Almost everyone in the world has PFAS in their body.**

We are continually exposed to these forever chemicals through food, water and the environment. Concentrations in our blood build over time. PFAS has been measured in both umbilical cord blood and breastmilk. **Children are now being born pre-polluted with PFAS.**

¹ The Danish legislation will set an indicator value of 10 µg/dm² dw to distinguish between existing environmental contamination and additionally added PFAS.

Despite such risks, manufacturers of these chemicals have not disclosed or shared sufficient data for the public, regulators, or the scientific community to accurately assess the health and environmental consequences of the vast majority of the >4500 PFAS in existence today.

Information uncovered about some of these PFAS chemicals has led to restrictions or bans due to their toxicity, persistence and potential for bioaccumulation. The information we have now on these PFAS chemicals raises enough concerns that we need to act now on all of these forever chemicals to prevent further harm.

This ongoing, and largely unregulated, toxification of our environment is a generational catastrophe that cannot be allowed to continue. There is no ongoing effort to clean up the widespread PFAS pollution in our environment, so we need stringent regulation now that stops it at its source.

Dark Waters lead actor and activist, Mark Ruffalo, says: *“For decades, industrial chemical companies have gotten away with knowingly polluting the environment and risking human health for economic gain. This has gone on far too long. To protect ourselves, our children and our environment, governments need to act now to end the unnecessary use of PFAS.”*

PFAS are used in a wide variety of everyday consumer products and industrial processes across the UK and worldwide. A key property exploited by manufacturers is the ability of PFAS to repel both water and oil, making them common-place, for example, in stain-resistant treatments for textiles and upholstery.

Recent testing commissioned by environmental charity Fidra has also revealed significant levels of PFAS in paper and board food packaging across a range of major UK supermarkets and takeaway chains.² **With the use of paper and board food packaging set to increase as supermarkets move away from plastic, it is imperative that action is taken now to ensure we are not simply replacing one problem with another.**

The need for forever chemical regulation

There are over 4,500 types of PFAS, but only two (PFOA and PFOS) have begun to be globally regulated. **Current UK regulation does not sufficiently cover many dangerous chemicals that people are exposed to on a regular basis.**

Lawyer and author Rob Bilott, whose 20-year fight against chemical manufacturing giant DuPont is dramatised in Dark Waters and detailed in his book *Exposure*, says: *“As the chemical industry’s move from PFOA to new PFAS-variant “GenX” has shown, it is not enough to restrict individual PFAS on a one-by-one basis. All share a similar chemical structure, therefore all should be reasonably considered as chemicals of concern.”*

² <https://www.pfasfree.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Forever-Chemicals-in-the-Food-Aisle-Fidra-2020-.pdf>

Group-based legislation is urgently needed to protect UK citizens and the UK environment from PFAS pollution.

This is an issue of critical importance. **We urge the UK Government to act now to address the issue of toxic chemicals in our everyday lives.**

Signed,

Mark Ruffalo, Actor and Activist

Robert Bilott, Lawyer and Author

Baskut Tuncak, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Toxics

Amelia Womack, Deputy Leader, The Green Party of England & Wales

Dr. Becky Gait, Director, Fidra

Dr. Michael Warhurst, Executive Director, CHEM Trust

Thalie Martini, Chief Executive, Breast Cancer UK

Louise Edge, Head of Greenpeace UK Ocean Plastics Campaign

Dr. Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link

Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

David Cowdrey, Head of Policy & Campaigns, International Fund for Animal Welfare

Veronica Yates, Director, Child Rights International Network

Dr. Matthew Winning, Research Associate, University College London

Dr. James G. Dyke, Assistant Director Global Systems Institute, University of Exeter

Astrid Perry, Associate Solicitor, Leigh Day

Prof Jacob Tompkins OBE, Director, The European Water Technology Accelerator

Paul Knight, CEO, Salmon & Trout Conservation

Mark Avery, Director, Wild Justice

Andy Atkins, CEO, A Rocha UK

Jennifer Lonsdale OBE, Trustee & Founder, Environmental Investigations Agency

Sandy Luk, Chief Executive, Marine Conservation Society

Andrew Simms, Assistant Director of Scientists for Global Responsibility and Co-ordinator of Rapid Transition Alliance

Kate Metcalfe, Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network

Rory O'Neill, Professor, School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool and Bureau member, UN Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)

Jamie Page, Chief Executive, The Cancer Prevention and Education Society

Kathy Wormald, Chief Executive Officer, Froglife

Beryl Leatherland, Convenor of the Scottish Wild Land Group