

To:

Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs;
Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy & Rural Affairs;
Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, Scottish Government
(once appointed);
Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs.

CC:

Rebecca Pow MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra;
Jo Churchill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health & Social Care;
Lord Callanan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State BEIS;
Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee;
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Chair, Health Select Committee.

Dear Ministers,

11th May 2021

As a group of 27 UK NGOs, with expertise across the fields of public health and the environment, we attach 12 Key Asks we collectively agree should be prioritised in the UK's Chemicals Strategy. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these Key Asks further.

As we evolve our national policies and approaches now we have left the EU, we have an opportunity to set ambitious goals and develop a world class system of chemical management. In doing so, it will help us meet our environmental targets to deliver our long-term environmental ambitions and drive green chemical innovation to stimulate economic growth and jobs after Covid-19. We, therefore, urge this Government to strongly consider our calls to action and to ensure this chemical strategy delivers ambitious and positive outcomes for our health and the environment.

Synthetic chemicals are used in many different applications throughout our society – from food packaging to building materials to cosmetics. We ingest them through food and drink, inhale them from the air we breathe and absorb them through our skin. Unfortunately, many of these chemicals are hazardous to the environment and threaten the health and wellbeing of UK citizens and workers.

The UN Environment Programme's Global Chemicals Outlook II found that hazardous chemicals are "ubiquitous in humans and the environment" [1], meaning that our bodies are being contaminated without our consent or knowledge. A wide range of serious health concerns have been linked to hazardous chemicals. These include fertility and reproductive development problems, hormone-related cancers, impaired brain development, and obesity and diabetes. A major review of research found an estimated 50-60% drop in sperm count in 'Western' nations since 1973 [2].

The World Health Organisation estimated the burden of disease from selected chemicals at 1.6 million lives in 2016. This figure has been highlighted as a likely underestimate [1]. Strengthening our knowledge of synthetic chemicals and how they interact with our bodies, represents a core component of disease prevention.

Hazardous chemicals are also polluting and accumulating in our environment. The most recent assessment under the Water Framework Directive showed that 0% of England's rivers, lakes and waterways met the legal water quality standards for chemical pollution [3]. These hazardous chemicals threaten the health of wildlife. For example, the UK's killer whale population has not had a calf in over 20 years; this has been linked to PCB pollution entering the marine environment.

In the enclosed document, we set out our priorities for action if the UK is to meet the challenge set out in the 25 Year Plan for the Environment of ensuring that chemicals are safely used and managed, and levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment are significantly reduced for present and future generations.

The Conservative Party 2019 Manifesto [4] promised "the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth". We believe the asks highlighted in the attached document are essential to ensuring this commitment is met, driving growth and innovation of green chemistry and design solutions, whilst protecting our environment for generations to come.

We welcome further engagement on this issue and look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Michael Warhurst, Executive Director, CHEM Trust
Thalie Martini, Chief Executive Officer, Breast Cancer UK
Jamie Page, Chief Executive, The Cancer Prevention and Education Society
Catherine Gunby, Director, Fidra
Sandy Luk, Chief Executive, Marine Conservation Society
Shaun Spiers, Executive Director, Green Alliance
Helen Lynn, Facilitator, Alliance for Cancer Prevention
Janet Newsham, Hazards Campaign
Deborah Burton, From Pink to Prevention
Hilda Palmer, Greater Manchester Hazards Centre
Kate Metcalf, Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network
Emma Rose, Director, Unchecked UK
Jacquie Loughrey, Education and Prevention Officer, Pink Ladies Cancer Support Group
Mark Owen, Head of Freshwater, Angling Trust
Mike Childs, Head of Science, Policy & Research, Friends of the Earth
Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Rosie Teasdale, Executive Director, Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) UK
Dr Stephen Head, Chair of Trustees, Wildlife Gardening Forum
Matt Shardlow, Chief Executive, Buglife
Joan Edwards, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, The Wildlife Trusts
Josie Cohen, Head of Policy and Campaigns, PAN UK
Dr Janina Grey, Head of Science and Policy, Salmon & Trout Conservation
Dr Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link

Gill Perkins, Chief Executive Officer, Bumblebee Conservation Trust
Shān Nicholas, Interim CEO, Parkinson's UK
Emily Kerr-Muir, Trust Manager, The Savitri Trust
Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust

[1] UNEP, 2019, Global Chemicals Outlook II <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/policy-and-governance/global-chemicals-outlook>

[2] Levine et al, 2017, Temporal trends in sperm count: a systematic review and meta-regression analysis <https://academic.oup.com/humupd/article/23/6/646/4035689>

[3] Environment Agency Catchment Data Explorer
<https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/>

[4] The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto, 2019 https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf