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Harry Cohen MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

21<sup>st</sup> July 2009

From Jim Fitzpatrick MP  
Minister of State for Food, Farming and Environment

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harry". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Thank you for your letter of 23 June to Dan Norris in which you forward details from Simon Birkett of the Campaign for Clean Air in London about the health problems associated with air pollution in the capital. I am replying as the Minister responsible for air quality issues.

Firstly, I want to say that air quality in the UK has improved significantly over the last 10 years and the UK government continues to take steps to ensure further improvements. In the recent budget, for instance, announcements were made to consider incentivising Euro 6 emission standards through company car tax and also to incentivise the choice of Euro VI vehicles. Once implemented these and other national measures should make further significant contributions to improving air quality.

Mr Birkett of the Campaign for Clean Air in London is right to raise concerns about air pollution on human health, which has shown to reduce life expectancy in the UK by an average of 7-8 months.

The health impacts of air pollution on all sectors of the community are something the UK government takes very seriously. We have in place an air quality strategy based on health effects. This was revised in 2007 and copies are available online from:

[\[http://defraweb/environment/airquality/strategy/pdf/air-qualitystrategy-vol2.pdf\]](http://defraweb/environment/airquality/strategy/pdf/air-qualitystrategy-vol2.pdf). We are taking forward actions from that. Local Authorities also have a duty to improve air quality in their areas. Further information on this can be found at:

[\[http://www.airquality.co.uk/\]](http://www.airquality.co.uk/).

Epidemiological studies have shown associated risks between poor air quality and impaired health, especially among vulnerable groups, such as children and those susceptible to allergies. As such, we keep abreast of all research into the health impacts of air pollution and how these effects can be mitigated or reduced in all areas designated as having an air quality problem.

We also have in place an air text/alert service which helps inform vulnerable groups about pollution risk so that they can take remedial action. Further information on this is available at: [<http://www.airtext.info/>]

Government has achieved a number of goals in improving the quality of the air we breathe, not only in London, but across the country, working closely with local authorities. Achievements include improved London bus and taxi emission standards (e.g. retrofitting schemes); promotion of smarter choices (walking or riding a bike rather than driving, for instance), incentivizing the early uptake of new Euro standards, increasing the uptake of low emission vehicles and reducing emissions from ships. London also has the largest Low Emission Zone in the world.

Air quality across Greater London is the responsibility of the Mayor of London. Defra meets regularly with the Greater London Authority to discuss progress on tackling air pollution in the capital and are engaged fully with GLA colleagues on developing and exploring measures to reduce the harmful effects of pollutants, especially in regards to Particulate Matter and Nitrogen Dioxide at roadside levels. We expect the Mayor's revised Air Quality Strategy to be released in September. It should build on the measures already in existence and we will continue to work closely with the GLA and Mayor to ensure that the Mayor's strategy is robust and effective in supporting air quality objectives.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns. Thanks for your interest in this matter.

Yours Sincerely  


**JIM FITZPATRICK MP**