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Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig  
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-839  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00239/20

Janet Finch-Saunders AM  
Chair of the Petitions Committee

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Dear Janet

Thank you for your letter of 24 January regarding Petition P-05-839, which asks for further information regarding World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines and the potential for accelerating the timetable in order to legislate to tackle air quality this Assembly term.

We comply with current legislative limits for particulate matter in Wales. However it is important to reduce average public exposure to particulate matter further due to the positive health benefits this can bring. Given the strength of evidence in relation to the impacts of particulate matter on public health, my ambition is to see concentrations across Wales below the WHO guideline for PM2.5 where it is possible, and lower still where there is sufficient potential and there is high public exposure or risk to sensitive groups. This is why I have committed in the draft Clean Air Plan for Wales to develop and consult on new targets for particulate matter in Wales as part of the development of a Clean Air Act for Wales.

The WHO guidelines represent recommended maximum levels for pollution in ambient air which countries should aim to achieve. They are set on an understanding of the human health impacts. As recognised by WHO, the standard-setting process needs to aim at achieving the lowest concentrations possible in the context of local constraints, capabilities and public health priorities. To do this, WHO encourages the adoption of increasingly more stringent standards and tracking their effectiveness over time. Therefore, future targets for ambient levels of fine particulate matter need to be underpinned by the right evidence and metrics to achieve the most effective improvement.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Understanding the processes behind future particulate matter emissions, its formation, and movement in the atmosphere is complex. The analysis we have undertaken so far has helped us to understand where further action is likely to be needed. However, without further analysis, we do not yet know whether it is technically feasible to achieve the WHO guideline absolutely everywhere across Wales, and how and by when it could be achieved if it is possible.

My officials are convening an independent panel of experts to advise on the right approach to take in developing new targets, taking the WHO guidelines into account and factoring in the technical, social and economic feasibility in meeting the targets. This will be important work to inform the development of new targets.

I have also committed in the draft Clean Air Plan for Wales to consult on and publish a White Paper before the end of this Assembly Term on legislative proposals to improve air quality through a Clean Air Act for Wales.

Developing legislation takes time to ensure it is fit for purpose. The draft Clean Air Plan consultation closes on 10 March after which my officials must have sufficient time to give the responses due consideration, potentially resulting in amendments to the proposals. Any Bill has to complete its passage through the Assembly before the next elections or else it would fall. The Assembly Committees need sufficient time to scrutinise a Bill properly and, combined with Standing Order requirements about timing of scrutiny stages, this means a Bill would need to be introduced before this summer's recess. There isn't time to complete the consultation, develop a Bill and pass it through the Assembly before the next elections. I am, therefore, proposing an already ambitious undertaking to consult on a White Paper within this timescale.



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