Dear Anna,

Thank you for your joint letter of 5 July, with several NGOs, about the forthcoming Chemicals Strategy.

As set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan, we have committed to publish a new Chemicals Strategy this year. The Strategy will provide a framework for future action to put us on a path for improved chemicals management. It will set out our priorities and principles for taking regulatory action to protect human health and the environment, and set the direction for priority chemicals issues.

I am aware of your 12 key asks for a Chemicals Strategy and understand the points you raise. The discussion we had when we met in January highlighted their importance and it is clear they are areas that we need to address. We are already taking action on a number of areas that you raise. For example, in April we accepted the recommendations from the UK REACH per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) regulatory management options analysis (RMOA). This will inform action on restrictions under UK REACH and more strategic coordination to managing PFAS risks – a significant milestone in protecting people and the environment from PFAS’ potential impacts.

Our Environmental Improvement Plan set out areas that the Chemicals Strategy will address, which covers many of the points you raise in your letter. These include:

- Managing priority and emerging chemicals of concerns, including Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) and addressing the cocktail effect from unintentional chemical mixtures.
- Chemicals regulation and how we will continue to use UK REACH to evaluate and manage the risks of chemicals, alongside completing the transition to a new Alternative Transitional Registration model and considering improvements to UK REACH.
- Improving our understanding of chemicals in the environment and using prioritisation and early warning to inform regulatory decision-making.
- Actions to reduce the risks to human health and the environment caused by hazardous chemicals throughout their life cycle.

These are also areas that we discussed with stakeholders through a series of collaborative workshops held last summer and most recently through a Friends of the Strategy Working Group; a sub-group of the UK Chemicals Stakeholder Forum (UKCSF). We will continue this engagement at the next meeting of this group, due to be held in September, where Defra officials will be seeking feedback on key areas under the Strategy.

The Chemicals Strategy will complement and build on other Government strategies and plans. This includes the recently published Plan for Water, which sets out the Government’s strategy to deliver a clean water environment, incorporating action to reduce the amount of PFAS entering the water environment.

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We are working closely across other Government Departments and Agencies, including the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the UK Health Security Agency, to ensure a joined-up approach to the protection of human health and the environment from the risks posed by chemicals. DHSC is also developing its new Major Conditions Strategy and Defra officials will continue to work closely with DHSC on its work to identify actions in the areas of prevention, treatment, and long-term management of care to improve outcomes for individuals across the major conditions addressed under the Strategy. One area in particular, where we are working closely with DHSC is in developing our approach to managing EDCs given the risk they pose to human health.

We want to maintain close links with you as we bring the Strategy together, and Defra officials will continue to provide updates, including through the UKCSF, as this work develops.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue. I look forward to hearing further views as the Strategy develops.

REBECCA POW MP