

18 April 2019

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you today on behalf of the RSPB, Wildlife and Countryside Link and Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) to express deep concern regarding the environmental impacts of pesticides, and to announce our formal resignation from the Pesticides Forum and Voluntary Initiative.

Our organisations have long participated in these voluntary groups in the hope that they would lead to better protection for the environment. We have contributed to the groups constructively for two decades. However, in that time they have failed to take meaningful or significant action to reduce pesticide-related harms, and have consistently advocated pro-pesticide positions despite our concerted efforts to the contrary. Meanwhile, the area of UK land being treated with pesticides has risen by more than half, and many of our crops are being treated more times with a wider variety of chemicals. As the last remaining members representing civil society, and in light of recent evidence as to the impacts of pesticides on the natural environment, we can no longer stand by while these initiatives bolster the positions of vested interests, in association with our organisations.

Government has recently taken positive steps by banning metaldehyde and supporting restrictions on neonicotinoids, and more than two-thirds of the UK public want pesticide use to be reduced. The Pesticides Forum and the Voluntary Initiative are clearly outdated and out of step with scientific evidence, public opinion and recent precedents that you have set.

The evidence of the ongoing deterioration of our environment clearly shows that voluntary measures have failed. As the UK exits the EU and its extensive framework of environmental regulations, it is more important than ever that we introduce mandatory measures which both reward those farmers working hard to use minimal or no pesticides, and discourage the overuse of pesticides that we know causes such harm to our environment.

So today, we are officially resigning from these voluntary bodies and calling for them to be replaced with the mandatory measures required to discourage pesticide use and support farmers to adopt non-chemical alternatives. Amongst other steps, these should include:

- Increased support for research into Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and better support to farmers to adopt IPM and organic techniques, for example through the Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- Introduce a pesticide-use reduction target alongside an improved monitoring system which measures the impact of pesticide use on human health, the environment and wildlife.
- Consult on the introduction of a pesticide tax to drive more sustainable use of pesticides in the future, with revenue reinvested into supporting sustainable agriculture.


We agree with you that the UK's exit from the EU should not lead to any weakening of pesticide standards. It is imperative that we use this unique opportunity to embed a more sustainable form of farming which is less reliant on pesticides.

We are keen to discuss the issues outlined in this letter at your convenience and look forward to hearing from you.

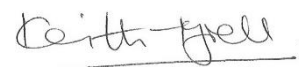
Yours sincerely,



Dr Mike Clarke, Chief
Executive,
RSPB



Dr Elaine King, Director,
Wildlife and Countryside Link



Dr Keith Tyrell,
Director of PAN UK