



Member of the European Parliament

Commissioner Stavros Dimas
Commissioner for Environment
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

18 December 2008

Dear Commissioner,

Heathrow expansion and the Air Quality Directive

We write as MEPs whose constituents are affected by the UK Government's proposals for expanding Heathrow airport. A formal announcement is now expected in January.

You will know that we are fully supportive of your drive to tackle the health impacts of poor air quality by raising standards across Europe using the impetus of the 2008 Directive. Given the imminence of the Heathrow decision in the UK, we would be very grateful if you were to confirm or clarify as soon as possible the following points or questions.

1. It is our understanding that the Commission expects Member States to achieve the annual mean nitrogen dioxide limit value of 40ug/m³ by 1st January 2010. Can you confirm this requirement and provide assurance that the Commission will not accept any arguments for non-compliance on economic grounds?
2. We understand that the Directive allows Member States to apply for an extension to the limit value deadline if they cannot meet this deadline. Can you confirm that before any application is granted you will require Member States to have fully demonstrated the actions they have taken in seeking to achieve compliance?
3. Can you also confirm that any extension granted will be for the shortest period necessary for compliance?
4. We know you are aware of the specific nitrogen dioxide exceedences in the residential areas around Heathrow. Can you confirm that in the event of an application by the UK Government you will assess NO₂ levels in the Heathrow area separately from the much wider Greater London area?
5. The 2008 Directive rightly strives towards seeking the cleanest air possible for residents throughout Europe. We interpret this as embodying a principle of continuous improvement. This would require Member States to take all opportunities to improve air quality both before the 2010 deadline and afterwards – including during any extension period. Is our interpretation of the Directive correct?

Given the complexities involved in modelling air quality around airports, we can offer support through the local councils in the worst-affected areas who would be willing to work with your air quality officers. We know from our meeting with you in July that successful contact between officers has already been established.

We are extremely grateful for the interest you have shown in the environmental impacts of expansion on the communities who live around Heathrow and can assure you of our continued support for the aims of the Directive and its full and proper implementation.

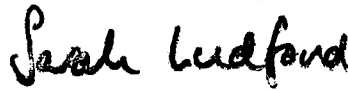
Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas MEP



John Bowis MEP



Sarah Ludford MEP

Text as sent by email 18/12/08