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Green Party
for the South East of England



The Rt. Hon Greg Clark MP
Secretary of State
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria St
London, SW1H 0ET

22nd January 2018

Dear Greg,

Re: Health implications of leaving EURATOM

We are writing to you to reflect the concerns of UK patient groups about the implications of leaving the EURATOM treaty, in particular regarding the risk to patient treatment reliant on nuclear medicine.

Medical isotopes play a vital role in both diagnostics and medical imaging as well as treatments for cancer, bone, liver and heart disease. NHS England data shows that approximately half a million scans are performed annually using imported radioisotopes, which is sounding alarm bells in patient and professional groups alike.

However as the UK does not produce its own isotopes, we are heavily reliant on international imports; mainly from the Netherlands, France and Belgium. You will be aware that isotopes have a very short shelf life, meaning that they cannot be stockpiled. Such proximity to the point of source is crucial for ensuring a secure supply of isotopes.

Whilst the UK could access isotopes from other parts of the world, Europe holds the nearest and most secure supply. Leaving the EURATOM treaty - and outside of the Internal Market - those supplies are likely to be less reliable and more expensive. Lengthy delays to customs checks would render the material unusable. This degradation would need to be offset by increasing the amounts purchased, driving up costs for the NHS and have a significant impact of patient care.

EURATOM also offers unique funding opportunities for research and development, which, via the Horizon 2020 programme, has seen €32 million provided to UK organisations. EURATOM also provides a key network that supports research and training in areas including nuclear safety, clinical radiation protection and the safe disposal of radioactive waste and the free movement of nuclear sector specialists.

As such, the Royal College of Radiologists, the British Nuclear Medicine Society and the British Medical Association have repeatedly expressed concerns about the threat to the uninterrupted, cross-border supply of medical isotopes. They have warned that delay and disruption to the supply of medical isotopes will have serious consequences on people's lives.

In order to ensure that the import of radioisotopes from the EU does not take longer or cost more it is imperative we have as close a relationship as possible with EURATOM post-Brexit at least for the health and safety aspects.

Yet, it appears that these health implications are not being prioritised within Government and we are gravely concerned that not enough has been done to engage stakeholders or develop a plan for ensuring a secure supply of medical radioisotopes for the UK post-Brexit.

The UK Permanent Representation to the EU has advised us that your department is leading on Euratom membership issues, but we would argue that such a significant issue needs a unified approach with the Department of Health, for example through a cross-departmental group so as to ensure that patient care is not left behind in the negotiations.

Furthermore, in leaving EURATOM, the UK will have to reproduce the safety standards and nuclear expertise that we enjoy as part of our membership of this treaty. Would you therefore set out what planning the Government has undertaken to counter the potentially devastating short-term and long-term impacts of leaving Euratom? We would also stress that importance should be given to upholding the current laws that enforce radiation safety and regulate movement of radioactive materials.

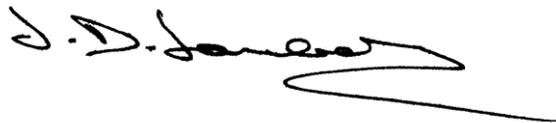
If the UK were to leave EURATOM, it will need to establish a State System of Accountancy and Control for Nuclear Medicine (SSAC) to fulfil our obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Could you confirm that the process towards application for SSAC been initiated?

It is clear that our membership of EURATOM is of crucial importance and that no one voted to leave this treaty and jeopardise the lives of millions of people in the UK. We therefore ask what assurances you can offer to patients who may - one day - need nuclear medical treatment, which is currently underpinned by our membership of Euratom?

Yours sincerely,



Keith Taylor - Green Party MEP



Jean Lambert - Green Party MEP