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Subject: Call for swift, comprehensive and universal PFAS ban

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European Commissioner for Environment, Water
Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy
Ms. Jessika Roswall
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Dear Commissioner Roswall,

On behalf of the Dutch Water Authorities and water companies, we wish to bring to your attention the increasingly urgent issue of poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). We strongly emphasise the necessity of rapidly implementing a comprehensive and universal ban of these toxic 'forever chemicals'. PFAS substances are almost impossible to remove from water, and harmfully accumulate in the environment, plants, animals, and humans.

The omnipresence of PFAS substances in the environment has become a major concern for citizens and governments worldwide. They are found in soil, air, rain, seawater, surface water, groundwater and drinking water. This is why the European water sector has repeatedly called for a universal ban on PFAS substances to prevent further contamination of the aquatic environment and drinking water sources.

The Dutch drinking water companies and water authorities are confronted with the issue of PFAS on a daily basis; during the production of drinking water compliant with the Drinking Water Directive (DWD) (drinking water companies) and wastewater treatment (water authorities), as well as in their efforts to comply with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) goals and while attempting to establish a circular water cycle (water authorities).

PFAS pollution is also a transboundary issue, which makes a European solution essential. The recent Commission report on the implementation of the WFD and the Floods Directive further emphasized this need, highlighting the poor chemical status of surface water throughout the EU. As part of the implementation of the DWD, the Commission has asked the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop recommendations on appropriate, and presumably stricter, PFAS standards by 2026. We strongly advocate for a uniform European approach to PFAS in drinking water, and to prevent diverging national standards.

Within the framework of the revisions of the Environmental Quality Standards Directive and the Groundwater Directive the Commission proposed similarly strict standards. In order to protect drinking water sources and to be able to reach the WFD goals, it is imperative that consistent EU legislation and standards are developed for surface water, groundwater and drinking water, and that coherence is guaranteed with other EU legislation on the activities of sectors that put pressure on water quality.

While the EU aims for zero pollution through the EU Green Deal with policies focused on tackling pollution at source, including the phase-out of PFAS substances as integral part of the Chemicals Strategy, it is struggling to fulfil this ambition. Given the risks to the environment and human health, the current omnipresence and the continued use, we stress that the most effective way to address PFAS-related problems is indeed to tackle this pollution at its source – that which does not enter the water does not require removal.

Accordingly, we fully support the restriction proposal the Netherlands submitted together with other EU Member States. It is currently being reviewed by ECHA, and aims to swiftly and fully restrict the use of PFAS, importantly also beyond consumer products. This proposal should deliver on preventing further pollution, and an ambitious timeline is pivotal in that regard. It will not only halt pollution and contribute towards the promised toxic-free environment and protect the health of EU citizens, it will also provide the necessary clarity for EU industries, which is crucial for their resilience and competitiveness.

Mindful of the fact that the debate surrounding PFAS has become increasingly political, we would like to thank you for your consideration of the above arguments and your understanding of the problems that PFAS pollution poses to the Dutch water sector. We hope to be able to count on your personal ambition and support for a full restriction of PFAS substances.

Yours sincerely,



Pieter Litjens

Chairman Association of Dutch water
companies (Vewin)



Jeroen Haan

Chairman Dutch Water Authorities