

9 December 2012

Mayor caught lobbying to weaken international air pollution laws

Mayor of London is lobbying for ‘flexibility’ in possible new laws and hiding his communications with 11 other European cities and regions in the lobbying group

BBC investigation discovers the Mayor’s partners include the some of the most polluted areas of Europe and the controversial ‘Lega Nord’ political party

The BBC Sunday Politics London show today concluded with an item on air pollution on the 60th anniversary of the Great Smog.

After the programme Simon Birkett, Founder and Director of Clean Air in London, tweeted on behalf of Clean Air in London:

#Boris’ adviser admits: lobbying to weaken #airpollution laws; his partners; & ‘error’ over #NBfL emission results

Clean Air in London (CAL) has issued the following clarificatory statement. Simon Birkett, Founder and Director of Clean Air in London, said:

“Clean Air in London might accept that the Mayor’s Environment Adviser did not ‘literally’ admit lobbying by the Mayor of London or his team to weaken air pollution laws. Indeed, the Mayor’s Environment Adviser ‘literally’ refuted, in his opening statement, that the Mayor is seeking to ‘loosen’ air pollution laws.

“CAL acknowledges that the Mayor’s Environment Adviser made the point separately that some of the regions included in the Air-Quality Initiative of Regions (AIR Group) are run by Red/Green alliances (which might be lobbying for improvements in public health) [as well as including the controversial ‘Northern League’ in Italy].

“However, Clean Air in London believes strongly that the substance of the Mayor’s international alliance, its purpose and/or the comprehensive investigation by BBC Sunday Politics London show that the Mayor has been and/or is lobbying to weaken UK and international air pollution laws.

“As Clean Air in London understands it, the Mayor interprets ‘flexibility’ to include the European Commission: recognising the compliance problem in London; giving London the resources to address it; and understanding the variables that are out of the Mayor’s control.

“However, the AIR Group statement on 10 November 2011 began by stating:

AIR emphasises that:

The revised [Air Quality] Directive shall include a degree of flexibility that allows the specific characteristics of our Regions to be taken into account

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“In the last 60 years scientists’ understanding of the dangers of air pollution has risen much faster than pollution has fallen. For example, even the Mayor’s own estimate is 4,267 deaths attributable to long-term exposure to ‘invisible’ air pollution in London in 2008. In a sense therefore, on the 60th anniversary of the Great Smog, we’re back where we thought we were in the 1950’s.

“In CAL’s view, there is no doubt. The Mayor has been caught lobbying with some of the most polluted cities in Europe to weaken laws that set minimum standards for public health across the whole of Europe. ‘Flexibility’ in air pollution laws means only one thing – no standards would ever be enforced in the most polluted cities like London.

“The Mayor should be demanding continuity and the further tightening of health and legal protections in London not joining others in a dive to the bottom of a smokey pit.”

Note

NBfL is the New Bus for London