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Chairman, European Scrutiny Committee,
House of Commons,
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Dear Chair,

UK imports of medical isotopes and withdrawal from Euratom

I recently wrote to you with regards to the use of a scrutiny override in the matter of the High Flux Programme at the Petten reactor. In that letter I promised to write to you separately in regards to concerns and questions that you raised on the issue of medical isotopes and the UK's withdrawal from Euratom. This is indeed an important subject and it is in no one's interest to disrupt the timely access of treatment to patients in the UK.

As you will have heard me say during the recent Westminster Hall debate on Euratom membership, the Government are absolutely determined that the nuclear industry in this country should continue to flourish and that the UK continues to have a constructive, collaborative relationship with Euratom.

Addressing questions you raise in your letter of 25 April 2017 to my predecessor, your assumption is incorrect that, in the absence of a new agreement between the UK and Euratom, the UK would be unable to import medical isotopes from other EU Member States after withdrawal.

However, I want to take this opportunity to again explain to you and members of the Committee that our ability to import medical isotopes from the EU will not be affected by our withdrawal from Euratom. It is correct that medical isotopes are currently governed and regulated under the Euratom framework, however Euratom places no restrictions on the export of these isotopes to countries outside of the EU. Moreover, these isotopes are not subject to Euratom Supply Agency contracts or to Euratom nuclear safeguards arrangements, meaning that there are no special arrangements that will need to be put in place ahead of the UK's withdrawal from Euratom. Therefore, the UK's ability to import medical isotopes from the EU or the rest of the world will not be affected by withdrawal from Euratom.

A range of medical radioisotopes are used in the UK, but Technetium-99m (^{99m}Tc) is the principal radioisotope and accounts for approximately 80 to 85% of all diagnostic investigations using Nuclear Medicine techniques. ^{99m}Tc is produced by the radioactive decay of molybdenum-99 (^{99}Mo), which is, itself, created in research nuclear reactors.

The UK has no research nuclear reactors and relies on imports of Mo-99 from reactors based overseas. There are three main companies in the UK that import Mo-99 and they source supplies from reactors mainly in Europe, but also from South Africa. The Government does not hold central data about the proportion of Mo-99 imported from the EU, this data will be held by the companies.

I am aware of industry views that an unsatisfactory withdrawal from Euratom risks significant impacts for the nuclear sector. This is undoubtedly the case, and in order to ensure no interruption in the quality and robustness of our civil nuclear regime a new team in the Department has been established and tasked with, among other work, taking forward negotiations with the EU, nuclear cooperation agreements with key partner states and establishing a domestic safeguards regime. Although no formal 'impact assessment' of leaving Euratom was carried out, detailed assessment of the impact and implications of leaving were made through dialogue and engagement with the nuclear industry, the R&D community and the independent regulator.

I want to reaffirm the Government's commitment to mitigate any interruption in the quality or robustness of our civil nuclear regime arising from withdrawal from Euratom. I am grateful for your interest and commitment in ensuring a smooth exit, and share your desire to ensure the best possible outcome for the UK.

I am copying this letter to Lord Boswell, Chair of the House of Lords European Union Committee, Les Saunders (DExEU) and Briony Thompson (BEIS).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Harrington". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Richard Harrington MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Energy and Industry