Dear Mr Gillett,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 January, to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP, regarding advertising for highly polluting vehicles. I am replying as a member of the Ministerial Support Team. Thank you and all signatories of your petition for your engagement on this issue. Please accept my apologies for the delay in you receiving a response.

At present, the government has no plans in place for ending sales of vehicles based on body type, including SUVs, or restricting the advertising of those vehicles. However, we are going further and faster to decarbonise transport. Our Net Zero Strategy will introduce a zero emission vehicle mandate, setting targets for a percentage of manufacturers' new sales to be zero emission each year, starting from 2024. We are also working hard to incentivise consumers to transition to zero emission vehicles (ZEVs). From 2035, all new vehicles must be fully zero emissions at the tailpipe, and the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans will end from 2030 onwards. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions faster, with savings equivalent to almost five million fewer cars on the road each year.

You raise a concern about the harmful health impacts of air pollution in our cities. We are working to reduce the harmful health impacts of air pollution in our cities through the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) Framework. This will deliver targeted action in air pollution hot spots to improve air quality and health, support economic growth in the urban environment, and encourage the replacement of old, polluting vehicles with modern, cleaner technologies. Local authorities are encouraged to create clean air zones independently of the government’s CAZ scheme and devise their own criteria for improving air quality as soon as possible. Our long-term ambition is to clean the air in our towns and cities and support industry to help cement the UK’s leading position in the design, manufacture, and use of zero emissions vehicles, which will provide economic opportunities by stimulating employment, investment and exports.

On advertising more broadly, the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) is responsible for regulating advertising across traditional forms of media (print, radio, TV) and online advertising. The ASA takes environmental issues seriously and addresses them through the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) Codes, which set the rules and standards for advertising to the marketing industry. Sections 19 and 20 of those Codes contain rules on motoring and sections 11 and 9 on environmental claims. These sections also cover SUVs advertising and ensure that claims relating to a vehicle’s fuel efficiency or emissions are accurate, adequately explained, and unlikely to mislead consumers. The ASA has also launched the Climate Change and the environment project, which explores the role that advertising regulation can play in responding to the climate change emergency and the human impact on the environment. More information about this can be found on the ASA’s website.
In addition, the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA), an executive agency of the Department for Transport, is the nominated UK enforcement body in monitoring all car advertisements to ensure they display the relevant fuel consumption and CO2 data. The VCA’s guidance notes provide further detail about the regulations advertisers need to follow when preparing automobile adverts.

Thank you again for taking the time to write on this issue.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Ministerial Support Team