KEYNOTE SPEAKERS & ABSTRACTS

PROF. GUY WOODWARD

Imperial College London (ICL)

University Profile

Google Scholar

Catchment-to-coast parasiticide pollution in UK waters: science, outreach and impact

Despite having been banned for outdoor agricultural use for nearly a decade, the potent pesticides fipronil and imidacloprid are still found in worryingly high concentrations in many UK waters, suggesting another source of contamination. Domestic pet parasiticide treatments for ticks and fleas, which use the same active ingredients, have been implicated as the prime suspects. Models and data suggest the major pathway into the environment is down-the-drain wash off, via wastewater treatment works. Contamination has been traced in both running and standing freshwaters and into UK coastal waters, often at concentrations that can cause harm to aquatic life under lab conditions. These two molecules are regularly ranked amongst those posing the highest risk to aquatic life. Growing concerns about the scale of this previously "hidden" pollution triggered a recent House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry, which released its findings in August 2026. These include a range of recommendations aimed at reducing the potential threat posed by these and other related parasiticide treatments at source, and also through changes to regulatory and industry practices. Here we explore the wider context around this issue and what the implications might be for the future of our aquatic ecosystems.

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