

Independent science based regulation needs defending from activist attacks and community ignorance

17 February 2020 (Armidale) – In his address today to the inaugural international conference on the regulation of agvet chemicals and technologies at the University of New England, Chief Executive Officer of the peak industry organisation for the plant science sector, Matthew Cossey, declared that Independent science-based regulation needs defending from activist attacks and community ignorance.

Mr Cossey addressed the modern challenges facing the agvet chemical industry and regulatory system.

“The efficient, effective and viable regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals is more critical now than at any other time in the last 60 years... Farmers are being challenged to deliver higher yields with fewer resources, produce more nutritious foods and improve existing agricultural methods in even more challenging circumstances. All this while maintaining and improving the number of crop protection products and solutions they have access to is becoming even more difficult.

“One of the great problems we face in modern society - because of the revolution in modern media and communications platforms - is we now have a huge number of people who have just enough information on any given subject to think they are right, but unfortunately don't know enough on that subject to realise they are wrong. This is no more evident than in the public discourse on glyphosate.

“There also appears to be an increasing disconnect between the community at large and the challenges facing the farming sector in continuing to produce food in line with community expectations, even if those expectations are based on entirely false premises.

“We need a reconnection of the community and the nation's political leaders at all levels of government with the needs of the farming sector, to ensure science- and evidence-based policy and associated regulation is protected and indeed enhanced.

“There appears to be no understanding in our cities that the introduction of chemistry into farming not only essentially doubled the production of existing agricultural land, but is the foundation to disease-free, nutritious, sustainable and affordable food.

“In fact, a Deloitte Access Economics report recently outlined that 73 per cent of the current total value of agricultural production in Australia is directly attributable to the access and use of crop protection products by farmers.

“The Australian community is fortunate that pesticides are regulated using the same rigorous scientific, risk-based framework as human medicines, to ensure that any hazards associated with a product are properly and effectively mitigated, while still ensuring that these crucial products are available to the farming and environmental land management sectors.

“Commenters and critics alike seem to forget that thousands of hours of R&D and scientific assessment by both industry and then regulators have gone into ensuring that when a product is used according to its label directions, it presents no unacceptable risk to users, consumers, animals or the environment.

“The challenge here is, how do we ensure that we reinforce with consumers that Australian farmers are worlds' best practice growers and producers and that we have a robust regulatory system that protects the community as a whole?

“It is beyond time for the government to step in, in a significant way, and properly inform the Australian community - perhaps starting in schools - about the regulatory environment for agvet chemicals and farming more broadly.

“That stated, there is as much an obligation on industry as there is on government and regulators, to ensure a world class regulatory system that has the full confidence of the Australia community about how farmers use these products.

“Industry-led stewardship initiatives that assist safe, proper and sustainable use of these products is the first line of defense against unnecessary regulation and the threat of critical products being removed from the market.

“The nature of public discussion and debate in this modern era is a real threat to independent evidence based regulatory science.

“It is time to take the false ideologies and food fanaticisms, that have no foundation in fact or science, out of agricultural policy, and especially prevent them warping the regulation of agricultural and veterinary technologies.”

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia is the national peak industry organisation representing the plant science sector in Australia. CropLife's members are the world-leading innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and crop biotechnology products. The plant science industry, worth more than \$20 billion a year to Australian agricultural production, provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies key to the nation's agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability. CropLife is part of the plant science industry's 91 country international federation.