
Better management needed to correct APVMA decline in on-time assessments

28 November 2023 (Canberra) – CropLife Australia is calling on the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to redouble its efforts to meet the statutory timeframes for the assessment of chemical products while also meeting its other regulatory responsibilities after its June 2023 quarter performance statistics revealed concerning trends in the agency's performance.

During the period March-June 2023 the APVMA's timeframe performance for major pesticide applications continued its downward spiral to 81 per cent, significantly below the previous quarter mark of 86 per cent. The report marks the fourth quarter in a row where on-time assessment has been below 90 per cent. Alarming, the result is despite the APVMA's workload for pesticide assessment falling by almost 20 per cent since the same quarter in 2022.

"The agricultural sector, a \$90 billion component of the Australian economy, relies on the timely approval of new and innovative pesticide products to remain globally competitive," said Chief Executive Officer of CropLife Australia, the national peak industry organisation for the plant science sector, Mr Matthew Cossey.

"The APVMA has been set legislated minimum timeframes for approval of agricultural chemicals to provide certainty to Australia's farmers around access and the confidence for the plant sector to bring new and innovative products to Australia. These timeframes are critical to the ability of APVMA's regulatory scheme to create public benefit. These maximum timeframes are also more than reasonable and achievable by any international comparison.


"As such, we are concerned that the recent decision by the APVMA to lower its targeted performance for on time assessment below legislated timeframes only serves to mask inefficiency and removes the incentive for improvement.

"This becomes even more apparent when considering the legislated timeframes provided to the APVMA are already generous when compared to equivalent international Regulators in North America and the European Union.

"What the Australian public and its farming community instead needs from the APVMA is the leadership necessary to implement the initiatives that will see it truly deliver across its full regulatory breadth, including on time assessment, compliance and chemical reviews. This is not a matter of resourcing; it is a matter of good management, implementation of appropriate efficiency measures and utilisation of accessible expert contracted services," said Mr Cossey.

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 \$31.6 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 a part of the plant science industry's 91 country international federation.



“With the APVMA taking precautionary regulatory action to manage any identified risk at the commencement of a chemical review, it is in the best interests of both registrants and the public for the APVMA to ensure reviews are not left needlessly open or take excessively long periods to complete.

“Australian farmers and the plant science industry have long sought the prioritisation of assessing and concluding open chemical reviews. If the APVMA lacks the internal capacity to do so, it should engage expert scientific consultants, as enabled under its legislation.

“Likewise, the APVMA should invest in regulatory technology solutions that will improve its ability to complete assessments and chemical reviews, enhancing regulatory consistency, transparency and integrity, while also future proofing the productivity of the APVMA.

“Utilising the power of technology, the APVMA could free up its most important resource, its expert scientists who have excessive workloads, to focus on the most important of its regulatory tasks. This would address the underlying cause of the delays in both the review program and new product applications, through technological modernisation of the assessment work.

“Despite this outlook, CropLife Australia and our members remain committed to working with the Regulator and Government to implement efficiency measures that improve the performance and maintain the integrity and community confidence in the system and deliver better outcomes for Australian farmers,” Mr Cossey concluded.

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