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## Farming productivity drought looms without action on innovation

**Tuesday 16 September** - CropLife Australia, the national peak industry organisation for the plant science sector, is warning that the continued delays in assessment times at the Australia Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) risks causing a long-term productivity drought for the nation's farming sector. Delayed access to new agricultural innovation and technologies for the nation's farmers will set back the productivity and sustainability of Australian agriculture at a time where it has never been more crucial to grow more with less.

In its submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into *Creating a more dynamic and resilient economy*, CropLife has called upon the APVMA Board to take immediate action to avoid a future crisis in our food production and our international competitiveness.

"Farming productivity creates a better Australia for everyone. It eases cost of living pressures at the supermarket checkout for Australians and grows our economy," said Matthew Cossey, CEO of CropLife Australia.

"Farmers rely on having access to technologies that support productivity growth. This has allowed Australian agriculture to lead the way in adapting to climate change and reduce pressure on our natural environment without sacrificing food security."

In its interim report, the Productivity Commission identified that reducing delays in regulatory approval is critical to attracting the investment necessary to drive productivity in the Australian economy.

"On this metric the APVMA has failed," said Mr Cossey.


"Current delays in application assessments at the APVMA for CropLife members alone add up to a combined total of nearly 40 years.

"Barely half of the applications for new, innovative crop protection products are being assessed within their mandatory, legislated assessment timeframe, with delays frequently exceeding 18 months for just one application. This has left Australia at the back of the queue for new plant science technologies and our farmers at a massive disadvantage.

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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 \$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.



"The APVMA Board has a responsibility to take immediate action and implement the governance to ensure it delivers high regulatory standards and supports investment.

"This includes simple steps like utilising modern software-based assessment tools rather than manual, repetitive models and improving the use of external expert scientific reviewers to increase assessment capacity are long overdue.

"Unfortunately, the APVMA Board in its recently released Corporate Plan have decided to reduce expectations rather than lift the Regulator's efficiency; ignoring statutory timeframes that underpin the predictability required for investment and entrenching a culture of underperformance.

"Given the Federal Government's stated priority of lifting productivity, it is deeply concerning to see the Board position the APVMA as the single biggest barrier to agricultural productivity for Australian farmers.

"It is unfortunate that the greatest inhibitors to productivity in Australian agriculture are some government departments, agencies and regulators.


"On top of the current dismal performance of the APVMA, the Department of Health, Disability and Aged Care is now in its seventh year of what should have been an 18-month process to modernise Australia's national biotechnology laws.

"Failure to implement the modern risk proportionate model for regulation of biotechnology agreed to back in 2018 has left farmers without the modern crop varieties that would boost productivity, enhance sustainability and deliver affordable food," concluded Mr Cossey.

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Key recommendations from the submission include:

- **Restore APVMA on-time performance:** Reduce delays and improve on-time performance to give investors certainty in bringing new technologies.
- **Fund the public good functions delivered by the APVMA:** Modest annual appropriations for APVMA compliance, enforcement and reconsideration work, tied to on-time performance.
- **Implement the reforms from the Third Review to the National Gene Technology Scheme:** Develop risk proportionate pathways in the regulation of biotechnology to restore Australia's position as a biotechnology leader.
- **Ensure regulation is risk proportionate:** Remove unnecessary BICON permits for low-risk organic and biocontrol inputs.
- **Support fit for purpose industry stewardship schemes in packaging regulation:** Recognise programs like drumMUSTER and bagMUSTER to drive a circular economy without added costs.

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