

Inquiry Submission on Regulation of Agriculture

AGRICULTURE AND VETERINARY CHEMICALS

Labelling. Currently chemical labeling by APVMA is ambiguous, too loose and NOT legally enforceable. There is no central point in Australia for reporting of chemical incidents, misuse or kills of any kind. Enforcing legislation is state based and therefore there is no true picture of chemical misuse in Australia.

There have been many beehives killed by chemicals in NSW – mainly cotton chemicals and not one prosecution despite obvious misuse of the chemical. For example: chemical label states DO NOT USE ON FLOWERING PLANTS. There were many witnesses to this chemical being sprayed onto flowering cotton (250 beehives were killed) and no one was prosecuted. After reporting bee kills there is never any investigation of the environmental damage (killing of native bees, insects, nectar bats, fish or marsupials) due to the chemical misuse.

Melon and Lucerne Seed Production. These activities are currently undertaken in the Griffith irrigation area along with cotton. In recent years there have been bee kills and hives severely damaged (bee numbers drastically reduced) due to cotton sprays when providing pollination for these crops. Melons get a 400% better fruit set with bees on site (less water, less chemical, less labour etc) for the same output with bees. Lucerne does not set seed without pollination from bees. The bees have to be next to or in the lucerne paddock for effective pollination. Some beekeepers are now saying no to pollination of melons and lucerne in the Griffith area as the risk of bee kills from cotton sprays is too high. This is affecting productivity and the abilities of landholders to diversify.

Current label laws need to be simplified (given 457 visa workers are using agricultural chemicals unsupervised and the low education standard of a lot of farm hands), standardized and legally enforceable.

APVMA should be allowed to use overseas independent test results (not those of the chemical companies). European testing is far more robust than USA testing and European test results should be used over USA test results. European testing uses the precautionary principle – the manufacturer has to prove it is safe to use. In the USA the user has to prove it is NOT safe. This is a cost shifting exercise away from the company that profits from selling the chemical.

Almond Pollination. Australia is the second largest producers of almond – behind the USA. The Australian almond industry is worth many hundreds of millions of dollars. There is a very true slogan – NO BEES = NO NUTS. The almond industry is planting new orchards every year. Currently there are enough beehives in eastern Australia to pollinate these almond orchards but within two years there will not be enough beehives.

Every beehive killed by poor chemical labeling or chemical misuse is a beehive that cannot pollinate almonds or other bee dependent crops. This ultimately affects productivity.

Most beekeepers are not prepared to expand their hive numbers to cater for this increased demand by almond pollination. Primarily because there is a lack of resource to support these extra hives. The lack of resource is due to current state legislation that prohibits beehives being in National Parks and some other crown lands. Beehives are allowed in some very limited areas in some National Parks (along and complex story).

Farmers are clearing eucalypt and mallee trees to supposedly make their farms more efficient which is reducing the available resource to beekeepers. Most eucalypt trees are found on public lands. A lot of this public land cannot be accessed by beekeepers under current legislation.

Limiting the number of beehives will limit agricultural productivity as a lot of agriculture relies on pollination by bees. Even milk, beef and fat lambs benefit from pollination provided by managed beehives in the form of clover and lucerne. Without bees for clover and lucerne seed production there will be less or no clover or lucerne to maximize milk, beef or fat lamb production.

Not all regulations or legislations are bad, however what regulations or legislation we have should do the task they were designed for.

Agricultural Chemicals and Aquifers. Most new chemicals are systemic i.e. they invade every part of the plant – leaf, stem, pollen, honey, seeds etc. These systemic chemicals end up in the soil (and food chain) as the plant degrades after harvesting. I am unaware of any research being done on these systemic chemicals leeching into waterways and aquifers or their pathways in the food chain. Glyphosate (Roundup) is now showing up in the breast milk of women in Germany. Chemical companies told everyone that it broke down in the soil and was harmless. The precautionary principle should be used with these new chemicals as they are basically brain toxins.

Legislation for chemical labeling should be improved and made legally enforceable.

BIOSECURITY

Australia currently benefits from being free from a lot of the pests and diseases that are present in the rest of the world. This is giving Australia's products a decisive edge when competing on the international arena. Bee Mites, Bee tracheal Mites, Deformed Wing Virus (all bee related) and Foot and Mouth Disease come to mind. Not having these pests and diseases reduces producer costs and helps produce a clean and green marketable product that can be sold for a premium.

Biosecurity regulation should be tightened certainly not reduced for most industries.

CONSUMER RELATED REGULATION - FOOD LABELLING

The consumer wants to see where the food product is produced (most do not care where the container or label came from). Containers or labels should not enter an equation that affects the food labeling origin (COOL).

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9 Feb 2016