
APVMA performance drop costs Australian farmers millions

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In written answers just provided to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee, the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) have reported escalating delays in registrations of new cutting edge agricultural crop protection chemicals. Now more than one in nine applications for new product registrations have not been completed within the legislated assessment period. These delays are leaving Australian farmers exposed to millions of dollars annually in preventable crop losses.

While the full suite of performance results of the APVMA are yet to be publicly released, the Senate Estimates written answers confirmed that only 78.3 per cent of assessments for major applications were completed on-time for the quarter ending December 2023.

“This is now the sixth successive quarter that the APVMA timeframe performance for major pesticide applications has languished below its own downgraded self-imposed targets,” said Chief Executive Officer of CropLife Australia, the national peak industry organisation for the plant science sector, Mr Matthew Cossey.

“The APVMA is one of the world’s leading regulatory science organisations, with a dedicated skilled and scientific workforce, however sensationalised political distractions and a lack of high-end strategic management over the last 18 months are at the foundation of this diminishing performance.

“Unfortunately, the APVMA’s failure to meet its statutory timeframe obligations is now having very real consequences for effective management of crippling pests and diseases.

“Fall armyworm, red legged earth mite, powdery mildew and fusarium crown rot are costing the farming sector dearly. Fusarium crown rot alone costs the farming sector more than \$400 million a year.

“The APVMA is an agency that is well resourced and presently sits on significant cash reserves that are at all-time high as a result of higher than required levies and fees that are paid by the plant science industry and add to on-farm costs.

“It is a false economy to assert that timely assessment of new crop protection products needs to be sacrificed in order for the APVMA to meet the full breadth of its regulatory obligations, including chemical review and compliance.

“This level of resourcing and the suite of regulatory tools available to the APVMA allows it to engage competent external scientific reviewers and new regulatory technologies, such as digitally integrated assessment tools which would facilitate on-time performance and improved decision making as part of meeting the full breadth of its regulatory obligations.

“It’s time for the APVMA’s Board of Governance and Executive Management make it their priority to use the tools at their disposal to improve the performance of its organisation and support the work of its brilliant hardworking staff.

“Key to this will be the recruitment of a permanent, full-time, relevantly qualified Chief Executive Officer with appropriate experience. It is time to cease the revolving door of stopgap, interim Canberra Public Servants filling the role. The new leadership of the APVMA needs to grasp the strategic opportunities before it and guide the long-term performance of the regulator out of the mire of mediocrity.

Mr Cossey concluded, “CropLife Australia and our members remain committed to working with the Regulator and the 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, consumers, and the environment.”

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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.

