



Hon. Diane Evers MLC
Member for the South West Region

Attn: Ms Lauren Lesiti, Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Committee Members,

PETITION NUMBER 63 – IMPACT OF PESTICIDES ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition No. 63 - Impact of Pesticides on Public Health. I confirm that I wish the Government/Committee to inquire into the matters raised in the petition. To the best of my knowledge, the issues described in this petition have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

The petitioners have raised serious and ongoing concerns that are of broad public interest, and therefore need immediate attention. Public concern is well founded. As the Western Australian Department of Health explains, pesticides can be dangerous to public health and the environment if not used correctly. In fact, the Department of Health maintains that before people use pesticides they should ask whether they are needed at all. The Department notes that 'in most circumstances, pest infestations can and should be prevented by eliminating the conditions they prefer or by creating barriers'. Therefore, the petitioners' call for a moratorium on the use of pesticides on public land should be considered.

Furthermore, scientific understanding of the epidemiological and environmental effects of pesticide use is continually improving, which means that the State Government must regularly re-evaluate legislation, regulation and policy governing the use of pesticides in Western Australia. I am aware that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) has regulatory responsibility for agricultural and veterinary chemicals up to the point of sale, however there are many legislative, policy and regulatory levers that the State Government should use, improve or develop to prevent harm to human health and the environment caused by the use of pesticides.

Elsewhere, governments are moving to tighten regulations or ban certain pesticides altogether. For instance, in February 2018 the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) released assessments showing that most uses of neonicotinoid pesticides represent an unacceptable risk to bees. It also identified that high risk to bees comes not from neonicotinoid use on non-flowering crops such as wheat, but from wider contamination of the soil and water which leads to the pesticides appearing in wildflowers or succeeding



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crops. These updated conclusions were published in 2013. As a consequence, the European Union recently announced a ban outdoor use of neonicotinoids. This will mean that neonicotinoid use will only be permitted in closed greenhouses.

The petitioners call for a Royal Commission into the regulation, importation, sale and use of pesticides, related illnesses and environmental harm. Similar requests have previously been rejected. For instance, Petition No 121, tabled by the Hon. Lynn McLaren MLC in 2016, requested the establishment of a Royal Commission into the use of pesticides in Western Australia. However, the Hon. Colin Barnett MLA, Premier of Western Australia, rejected the call to establish a State based Royal Commission, despite noting the significance of the report *Management of Pesticides in Western Australia* released by the Auditor General in 2015, which raised many significant issues requiring attention (Correspondence Ref: 24-612921). The report noted that accepted levels of pesticide residue were exceeded in 11% of food samples in some years, and questioned the lack of legislative checks. As the Hon. Lynn McLaren MLC noted in her submission for Petition No 121, there was limited follow up or reporting of these results, with the result that agencies were unable to effectively identify the causes of this over-exposure and were therefore unable to implement measures to reduce it.

At the time, the Premier explained that he was keen 'to give the responsible State agencies the opportunity to have their time for their responses to the Report's recommendations to take hold and strengthen the current risk based approach to checking pesticide compliance'. The Public Accounts Committee was to monitor that process. This was one of the two reasons given to deny the establishment of a State based Royal Commission. Given that three years have passed since the Report was published, it is now time for a public evaluation of the responses to date, and recommendations for further improvements.

The petitioners also call for a moratorium on the growing of pesticide resistant genetically modified crops such as Roundup Ready GM canola. I support this action since it is Greens (WA) policy to encourage and support legislation and actions that reinstate Western Australia's moratorium on GM crops.

The Greens (WA) call for the State Government to immediately undertake further investigation into the use of pesticides, including the illnesses and environmental harm that these products can cause. A Royal Commission would be an appropriate mechanism for this investigation to use since it would have the capacity to cover the breadth of issues and engage relevant stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Diane Evers MLC
Member for South West Region
11 June 2018