‘Face the facts’ amid data fears

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“The APVMA in its vision says it wants to be a global leader in agricultural and veterinary chemicals regulation for the benefit of Australia.

“It should provide leadership on this issue and tell these chemical companies to lift their game in terms of their trial work.”

Mr Bell said the APVMA also needed to follow its own deadlines.

“I have a review into the APVMA which I submitted on time on February 11, and it’s now December and I don’t have comments back yet,” he said.

“The losers in this are of course the chemical companies, but mostly the farmers who have lost a year or two or three of use of this chemical.”

Other reviewers declined to be named, for fear that they would no longer be asked to tender for future APVMA reviews.

One said some of the trial work supporting new applications was “bordering on fraudulent” while others described information as “garbage”, “suboptimal” and showing a lack of attention to detail.

“Trial work we are looking at is largely rubbish,” one reviewer said.

“In some cases it appears the applicant is seeing what they can get away with, that they don’t understand trial work and the losers are the people who use agricultural and veterinary chemicals.

“I’d be lucky to pass 20 per cent of reviews on first go.”

Farmers who use agricultural and veterinary chemicals lose out where there is poor trial quality data and delays.

Another reviewer said the quality of science had gone downhill in the past five years.

“There’s short cuts being taken, and you just can’t give the tick (approval) to it,” the reviewer said.

“The quality of science has dropped dramatically and the APVMA is not providing leadership on this.”

The reviewers also spoke of the delays within the APVMA processes, where agreed milestones in the approval process were not met, further stalling the release of new chemicals.

The APVMA is funded by cost-recovery from the industry it serves. In its latest quarterly report, the APVMA blamed problems with applications for its tardiness.

“Deficiencies in submitted applications continue to cause delays in timeframe performance,” the report said.

The APVMA said applicants had a responsibility to provide high quality evidence to show how a proposed product met regulatory criteria for safety, efficacy and trade.

“APVMA assists applicants through data guidelines and templates to meet our stringent safety, efficacy, and trade criteria.”

CropLife Australia chief executive officer Matthew Cossey said delayed access to chemicals had cost farmers hundreds of millions of dollars annually, in lost production. But he said CropLife member companies, which include big players like Syngenta, Nutrien Ag Solutions, Nufarm and Bayer, were global leaders in registration and regulatory compliance.

“Our members support the highest standards in trial design and rigour,” Mr Cossey said.

G-wagons fighting fit for season

PETER HUNT

Forest Fire Management Victoria has managed to get its 290 Mercedes-Benz G-wagons back on track, after cracks were found in some of the ultralight tanker’s chassis this spring.

Government sources confirmed all vehicles had been inspected and the cracks repaired, just in time for the worst of the summer fire season.

The G-wagons are fitted with specialised bodies, falling object protection structures and water tanks, which lifts their fully laden weight to between 4.4 and 4.6 tonnes.

It remains unclear if FFMVic has also been able to complete repairs to the subframes on some of its 59 Unimog 4WD tankers that had also been taken off the road.

The fleet of 4WD vehicles is critical to FFMVic’s role in fighting forest fires, where they play a key role during backburning in suppressing breakouts and spot fires.

The G-wagons were purchased as part of a $35m deal in 2014, with another $32m contract signed with Mercedes in 2016 to supply more of the vehicles, plus the Unimog vehicles.

FFMVic borrowed about 30 tankers from the NSW Rural Fire Service and another five from the SA Country Fire Service last month.

Export charge blindsides ag

KATE DOWLER and CONOR FOWLER

An unexpected move by the federal government to recover regulatory costs of agricultural exports has shocked the nation’s farm sector and exporters.

The cost is expected to be in the realm of “millions and millions” for agricultural exporters, sources told The Weekly Times.

The government announced late last week the new cost recovery arrangement for exports would be introduced from July 1 next year.

Farmer and exporter representatives were scrambling to understand what the changes would mean this week, after being given just three hours’ notice ahead of a meeting with government representatives that announced “what amounts to a significant cost shift on to industry”.

National Farmers’ Federation president Hamish McIntyre said the NFF was concerned the proposed changes “may hurt the competitiveness of agricultural exports and producers”.

An Australian Meat Industry Council spokeswoman said: “Industry ‘consultation’ has been consultation in name only, following an opaque and inadequate review of cost recovery arrangements by DAFF.”

AMIC was “extremely disappointed by the absence of meaningful consultation or any serious effort to reduce the regulatory cost burden on industry”.

Grain Producers Australia southern director Andrew Weidemann said “any cost burden to grain producers is a very real concern”.

AusVeg chief executive Michael Coote said the consultation was not genuine, but was “instead the government telling vegetable grower exporters it is a forgone conclusion that they will be hit with higher export fees and charges, with no commitment that the level of service – which can only be provided by government – will improve”.

Nationals leader David Littleproud said it was “very concerning that the Albanese Labor government has allowed the department’s costs to provide export services to blow out while implementing limited efficiencies and now expecting the agriculture industry to pay”.

A statement from Agriculture Minister Julie Collins said the cost of providing regulatory exports functions outstripped revenue raised for the 16 of the past 20 years, with export arrangements having received $138m in supplementation measures from the government since 2023-24.

The minister’s statement said the cost recovery arrangement was needed to ensure vital export regulatory services were sustainably funded and continued to meet industry needs.

There would be a phased return to cost recovery over the next three years for most arrangements.

Industry could expect to be asked to provide feedback early next year.