Tuesday, 22 March 2011

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP
Secretary of State for
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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Dear Secretary of State

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE USE DIRECTIVE

I am writing on behalf of the Pesticides Forum, following its meeting last month. Without exception members of the Forum, representing all sectors involved with pesticides, were very concerned to learn that the Government intends to remove the requirement for sprayer operator certification. We believe this would result in a reduction in the standards of application practice from that which is currently required under existing legislation. I am therefore writing on the Forum’s behalf to stress our concern and to ask that the ‘proposals’ for implementation in the UK are reconsidered to avoid the current levels of good practice declining.

The Pesticides Forum was introduced in 1996 to encourage responsible pesticides use. The Forum’s membership brings together a wide range of organisations representing those who make, use or advise on pesticides as well as environmental, conservation and consumer interests. In all our nearly 15 years The Pesticides Forum and our members have worked hard to improve standards of user behaviour, along with The Voluntary Initiative and other organisations or initiatives. Our Annual Report monitors this progress each year. I have included more details on the Pesticides Forum as an Appendix.

The Forum has always viewed a combination of regulation and voluntary approaches as being appropriate. The balance of these might vary between sectors – with sectors where assurance schemes have a greater impact seeing greater voluntary uptake than those where no such incentives exist. Sectors where we know there is currently a lower level of uptake include some areas of amenity and those where users only occasionally apply professional pesticides. In terms of these, the Amenity Forum is working hard to increase levels of uptake and has recently given its full support to an assurance scheme for amenity.

Throughout the development of the Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) The Forum has worked closely with officials from Defra and the Chemicals Regulation Directorate in evolving the UK’s position and influence the content. Not only have members welcomed this opportunity, but they have also been very pleased to see that lessons learned from our activities, and those of member organisations, have been incorporated thus helping to ensure that best practice continues to be adopted and improved in the UK and wider in the
EU, to ensure that we can secure food, enhance the environment and protect users, consumers and the public.

Previous discussions and the consultations on the SUD led us to believe that the Directive would be fully implemented, in the way we believe it was intended, and would raise standards. We are now therefore very concerned that the existing high standards will not be maintained. Throughout these considerations, it was our clear understanding that the intention was that all pesticide users and advisers would require initial training, obtain a certificate of competence and receive further training to keep their knowledge up-to-date. Unfortunately, Article 5 of the Directive does not state that all sprayer operators and advisers must obtain a certificate of competence to demonstrate that they have been trained but instead only states that Member States must provide access to training.

We therefore are most concerned that if the regulation is directly transcribed into UK law it would not include powers to implement or enforce these certification requirements. This would result in a reversal of the existing UK legal requirement for certification of sprayer operators.

To conclude, the Pesticides Forum believes that the UK implementation of the Sustainable Use Directive into UK regulation must not result in lowering of standards from the existing regulatory underpinning of voluntary measures and needs to ensure that the current standards of practice are retained or improved. It would also be preferable if there was a requirement for on-going training/continuous professional development to supplement initial certification and to keep users up to date in this fast developing area.

If you would like to discuss this issue further or to hear direct from members of the Forum we would be very pleased to either meet with you or if possible for you to attend a future meeting. Our next meeting is planned for 22 June.

Yours sincerely

JAMES CLARKE
Chairman Pesticides Forum

cc: Lord Henley
    Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Pesticides Forum Objectives and Membership

Overall aim
- To continue to oversee work under the Government’s UK Pesticides Strategy, monitor the effects of policies, laws and other initiatives that affect or are affected by the use of pesticides, and offer advice to Ministers and stakeholders as appropriate.
- To provide a forum for exchanging views, and wherever possible allowing our stakeholders (the people who have an interest in our work) to come to a general agreement.

Specific objectives
Communications
- To promote effective ways of helping all those involved in selling, supplying, storing, using and disposing of pesticides and pesticide waste products to use technologies and techniques which:
  1. limit the need to use these products (and the risks that can arise from using them) in a way which is consistent with sustainable production and the control of pests, weeds and diseases; and
  2. share best practice between all farming systems, whether these use pesticides in organic systems or use other control options.
- To monitor, review and improve the quality and relevance of information available to all those involved in selling, supplying, storing, using and disposing of pesticides and pesticide waste products.
- To prepare and publish an annual report of our activities and maintain a close working relationship with the Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Monitoring impacts
- To consider how to most effectively monitor all impacts arising from the use of pesticides (including using indicators), and communicate these findings to Ministers, our stakeholders and the public.

Knowledge transfer
- To monitor pesticide-related research and development and aim to inform funding organisations of any significant gaps in the programme.
- To promote the most effective and practical ways for sharing best practice and encouraging the use of technology and research and development, by encouraging discussions between researchers and research funders, and between all those involved in selling, supplying, storing, using and disposing of pesticides.

Pesticides Forum Membership
The Pesticides Forum is a UK wide stakeholder consultative forum which brings together a range of organisations (both public and private sector) with a role in the sustainable use of pesticides. Members represent all aspects of use and potential impact from pesticides (broadly human health and environment). Members therefore include industry, environmental and conservation organisations, trade unions and consumer groups. Representation is designed to ensure that relevant interests in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are covered. Full details are available from http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/pesticides_forum.asp?id=2068.