

Brief overview of new European pesticide policy proposals

In July 2006, the **European Commission** proposed 3 new pesticide policy proposals which will cover the authorisation and use of pesticides, under the “*Thematic Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides*.” These proposals include:-

- Replacement of Directive 91/414/EEC with a new Regulation covering the authorization of pesticides
- A new Framework Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides
- A new Statistics Regulation

In accompanying documentation to the proposals the European Commission clearly acknowledged the long term impacts of pesticides by stating that long-term exposure can lead to cancer and neurological effects, amongst other conditions, including for those living in the locality to sprayed fields.

The aforementioned Commission proposals are subject to the co-decision procedure. This means they are considered separately by the European Council and the European Parliament. The European Council (represented by the Presidency) and the European Parliament (represented by a Rapporteur) then get together to agree the final text.

These pesticide proposals will set pesticide policy throughout the whole of the EU for at least the next 10 years and possibly even the next few decades. Therefore whatever goes in is absolutely of the utmost importance. Also if the proposals remain with a key focus on the protection of public health and the environment then this will obviously override the UK Government’s absolute inaction in protecting human health from pesticides.

The **European Parliament** completed what’s called the 1st reading on both the new Regulation to replace Directive 91/414 and the new Framework Directive in the plenary session in October 2007 where all MEPs voted on amendments to the European Commission’s proposed text.

The Framework Directive covers issues such as National Action Plans to reduce risks and dependence on pesticides, public awareness and information regarding the risks and adverse health and environmental effects of pesticides and non-chemical alternatives, as well as prohibition of pesticide use around public and other sensitive areas.

Since January 2007, the UK Pesticides Campaign has focussed on the European proposals and I spent a good part of 2007 going backwards and forwards to Brussels to make representations on behalf of rural residents and communities to MEPs from all political parties. The UK Pesticides Campaign has been the only representative of rural residents that has been lobbying hard in Brussels specifically on behalf of residents and communities.

Key amendments that were voted through regarding residents in the European Parliament's 1st reading report include:-

- the prohibition of pesticide use in substantial no spray zones around residential areas, parks, public gardens, sports grounds, school grounds, playgrounds, amongst other places, especially to protect sensitive groups, such as, babies, children, pregnant women, the elderly, those with pre-existing medical conditions and who may be taking medication, along with all other vulnerable groups
- a new legal obligation for farmers and other pesticide users to provide information on the pesticides used directly to residents and neighbours
- the classification of rural residents as a vulnerable group
- a clear definition of a substance of concern being any substance that has or potentially has either carcinogenic, mutagenic, endocrine disrupting, neurotoxic, immunotoxic, reprotoxic, genotoxic or skin sensitizing capabilities should be regarded as a substance of concern
- a new definition for the prioritization of non-chemical methods of plant protection and pest and crop management (including rotation, physical and mechanical control and natural predator management)

These are things that the UK Pesticides Campaign has been campaigning for since the outset of the campaign at the beginning of 2001 and it is absolutely critical that all these key amendments that have been adopted in the 1st reading reports are retained.

The **European Council** considered the Framework Directive proposal in December 2007 and unfortunately considerably watered down the proposal. However, what happens next is that the Council's adopted text goes back to the European Parliament for what is called a 2nd reading where amendments that have been adopted in the Parliament's 1st reading report can be re-tabled. **This will give another chance for residents to make representations to MEPs regarding these critical policy proposals.**

The Council's consideration of the other proposal, the Regulation to replace Directive 91/414 was supposed to have been decided at the Agriculture Council meeting on 19th May 2008. However, due to disagreements between Member States the decision has now been postponed until the Agriculture Council meeting on 23rd – 24th June 2008.

The time-scale of the **European Parliament's** 2nd reading for both the new Regulation and the Framework Directive is unlikely to be until September 2008. Then it will take months to formally adopt and publish the proposals and then there will be approx. a further 2 years for Member States to put the necessary provisions in place.

For further information on the European proposals contact me at gdowns25@tiscali.co.uk