Press release | 01.06.2016

Toxic substances/Glyphosate

Commission back-down must lead to complete rethink on toxic pesticides

The European Commission today proposed a temporary 'technical extension' of the EU approval of the herbicide glyphosate for a limited period (1). The proposal comes after the failure to secure a qualified majority of EU governments in favour of re-approving the controversial substance for 9 years, as previously proposed by the Commission. Commenting on the development, Green environment and food safety spokesperson **Bart Staes** stated:

"This proposal for a 'technical extension' has to be seen as the Commission backing down, after its failure to bulldoze through the re-approval of glyphosate following heavy industry lobbying. While it means an eleventh hour reprieve for glyphosate, this is hopefully only temporary and this should be the beginning of the end for this toxic product. The EU will now have to finalise its assessment of the health risks with glyphosate, both as regards it being a carcinogen and an endocrine disruptor. However, glyphosate's devastating impact on biodiversity should have already led to its ban. The significant public mobilisation and political opposition to reapproving glyphosate has been taken seriously by key EU governments and the Commission has been sent back with its tail between its legs.

"Only last month, the European Parliament voted to highlight its concerns with glyphosate and adopted a resolution opposing approval of glyphosate for most of its uses. MEPs voted to oppose the approval of glyphosate in agriculture where there are alternative methods for weed control, in the pre-harvest stage, in public parks and playgrounds and for hobby gardeners. The Commission has very belatedly taken some of these recommended restrictions on board today but it is too little, too late. In the interim, EU governments should now act at national level, where member states can introduce their own bans or restrictions, as France has already indicated it will do.

"The whole controversy surrounding the re-approval of glyphosate has revitalised the debate about Europe's agricultural model and the dependence on toxic substances in the current system. This is already starting to filter through the policy-making process, with the Dutch EU presidency having flagged up the debate this week. This opportunity now needs to be seized both as regards phasing out glyphosate and other toxic herbicides and pesticides, as well as fundamentally reorienting the EU's Common Agricultural Policy towards a more sustainable agricultural model."

(1) With the current approval of glyphosate set to expire at the end of June and insufficient support from EU governments for re-approval, the European Commission today proposed a 'technical extension' of the current approval until after the European Chemicals Agency delivers its opinion on glyphosate; this

extension can be for a maximum of 2 years; ECHA is expected to deliver its opinion by autumn 2017. This proposal will now have to be accepted by representatives of EU governments in the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed on 6 June 2016. The 'technical extension' means the Commission has dropped the proposal for a longer term re-approval.

(2) The European Food Safety Authority yesterday belatedly responded to a freedom of information request from the Greens/EFA group, regarding access to the studies it used to determine its opinion on the carcinogenicity of glyphosate. They proposed to create a reading room for the studies but have asked for more time to determine which studies they will make available (until 22 June). EFSA listed the studies and stated that 100 are public and 82 are not.

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Bart Staes

Member

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