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Ban on esters a blow: 4farmers

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Supply of 2,4-D HVE active constituent has ceased immediately.

IN its distinctive emotionally-charged style, ABC's *Four Corners* has once again targeted Australian farmers.

And like its exposé on live exports, the consequences are expected to be felt for some time to come.

The *Four Corners* episode, which aired last month, centered on herbicides 245-T and 2,4-D and led to a series of herbicide bans in Australia.

And last week, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) announced it had cancelled the registration of 11 high volatile ester products (HVE) and two active constituents.

Supply of the cancelled 2,4-D HVE active constituent has ceased immediately and use of the herbicide after August 31, 2014, will be illegal.

Tight restrictions on the use of 2,4-D HVE products have been in place since 2006 while data about the environmental impact was generated under Australian conditions.

But a recent assessment completed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment determined the risks of the use of 2,4-D HVE products were unacceptable and couldn't be mitigated.

One scientist, asked by *Four Corners* to test a product imported from China, said it had one of the highest dioxin readings for 2,4-D in the last 10 to 20 years, and could pose potential health risks.

Dioxins are environmental pollutants that, while not deliberately produced, are released mainly as by-products of combustion or certain chemical production processes.

Chemical supplies company, 4Farmers general manager Neil Mortimore, believed the so-called environmental concerns were a smoke screen for the perceived problems with movement of the product and the decision to ban products was poor.

"All creditable field data has shown Ester 800 moves little more than any other chemical," Mr Mortimore said.

"None of these studies have been rebutted or refuted.

"The field evidence just doesn't fit the theoretical models of the bureaucrats and it is an insult to the researchers who have done the field data."

Mr Mortimore argued that the environmental issues were no more concerning than many other older products farmers were using.

"If the product is proven not to move from the target site, then why the increased attention of off-target environmental concerns?" he asked.

"There are about 220 registered 2,4-D products in Australia, with sales representing between seven and eight per cent of all herbicide sales."

4Farmers will review chemical alternatives and is considering appealing the decision at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, or making a significant investment into more research to get the product registered again.

"We know other similar products are registered so we have no doubt the product could do it," Mr Mortimore said.

"It is just a massive and unnecessary imposition on us and a great loss to farmers, for the wrong reasons.

"The decision is a tragedy for WA farmers because it narrows their product choice and removes one of the cheapest and most effective broadleaf weed controls."

Nufarm research and development manager Andrew Wells said grain growers would continue to have access to Estericide 800 formulations following the registration of two Nufarm and Crop Care products, Nufarm Estericide 800 and Crop Care Ester 800.

"Both products can be used from May 1, 2014 to August 31, 2014 and contain both fallow and in-crop registrations," Mr Wells said.

Use of the products outside of this application window will be illegal.

According to Mr Wells, Nufarm had made a sizeable investment towards summer research trials, atmospheric monitoring and chemistry studies to ensure these products remained available to WA growers.

"The differences between the products that have been deregistered and Nufarm and Crop Care products are that Nufarm Estericide 800 and Crop Care Ester 800 product labels have an eight-fold reduction in the maximum label rates from 5.6 litres a hectare to 700mL/ha," he said.

"They are also only for use in WA and stipulate a number of additional requirements by the user."

According to the APVMA, registrants and approval holders were notified last month of the APVMA's intention to cancel the registration of 2,4-D products.

In a statement released last week, it said the deregistration of products marked the completion of its review of 2,4-D.

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