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POSITION

**HCPA view on the Commission
Communication: Towards a Thematic
Strategy on the Sustainable Use of
Pesticides (COM 2002/349 final)**

Hellenic Crop Protection Association view on the Commission Communication: Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (COM 2002/349 final)

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Hellenic Crop Protection Association's view on the Commission Communication: Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (COM 2002/349 final)

1. Introduction

HCPA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Commission Communication "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides".

The Association as well as its members strive to create awareness of the crop protection industry's contributions to sustainable agriculture and the quality and safety of our food, and of the role crop protection products play therein.

We appreciate the Commission initiative of a stakeholder consultation on potential measures to ensure the sustainable use of crop protection products, which should become part of the envisaged Thematic Strategy. We believe that the debate on future measures needs to be based on sound science and should not be used as a platform for myths and anti-pesticides campaigning.

In order to contribute to the debate on the future Thematic Strategy we would like to provide the following comments on the Commission's Communication.

2. General Comments

The Commission Communication is a good basis for the discussion on the measures that need to be considered within the envisaged Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides.

The contribution to sustainable agriculture needs to be taken into account when considering measures to promote the sustainable use of crop protection products as part of the Thematic Strategy. Crop protection products play an important role in today's agriculture, ensuring that crops are protected from pests, weeds and diseases. They contribute to the sustainability of today's and future agriculture, allowing for an economically viable agricultural production and a continuous supply of high-quality food at affordable prices to the consumers.

It is important, that the Commission acknowledges within its Communication the necessity of crop protection.

HCPA also acknowledges that the suggested measures are intended to complement existing legislation and should be targeted at the CPP use phase. We believe that any duplication or overlap with other legislation (particularly Directive 91/414/EEC) should be avoided.

The above should consistently be recognised throughout the proposals for measures that may become part of the Thematic Strategy. However, some parts of the suggested measures in the Communication do not reflect the above consideration, and could lead to overlapping legislation.

Furthermore the costs and benefits of any suggested measure need to be considered against the objective to be achieved. It should in particular be assessed whether the proposed measure is proportionate to the issues to be tackled.

Many of the suggested measures (such as those on reporting and information/data collection) are very demanding with regard to their practical implementation and involve significant costs and administrative burden for the whole food production chain. Before embarking on such proposals, it is essential to clarify how the data will be used and how it helps in achieving the goals of the Thematic Strategy.

Hellenic CPA also sees the need to assess where measures can best be taken. The measures need to be adapted to the local situation and the nature of the problem being tackled.

For some areas the best solutions can be found on the local level (at farm or even field), and a general EU-wide measure would not be appropriate. In these cases flexibility is needed and it should be left to Member States to prioritise local needs and decide on the best means to tackle specific problems. Subsidiarity is of particular importance when it comes to the practical implementation of potential measures.

Furthermore we feel that the measures relating to agricultural production systems need to be co-ordinated with the outcome of a future CAP reform, in order to prevent duplication and unnecessary additional burden for the farming community.

3. Specific comments on the measures suggested in the Communication

3.1 Most appropriate measures to ensure the sustainable use of CPPs and to further reduce potential risks associated with the use of CPPs

Having analysed the Commission Communication, HCPA (working closely to its European Partner European Crop Protection Association) believes that several of the suggested measures will help to further reduce potential risks associated with the use of crop protection products. These should be further considered within the future Thematic Strategy and need to be discussed in more detail at a later stage.

We strongly believe that the focus of the future Thematic Strategy has to lie on the following areas:

- Education and training of CPP users
- Regular technical inspection of application equipment and standards for storage of CPPs
- Promotion of good practices and integrated farming systems including ICM

3.1.1 Education and training of CPP users

Continuous training is essential to the effective and responsible use of crop protection products. It is a prerequisite for ensuring good agricultural practices.

Potential environmental impacts of crop protection products can be avoided if products are used in the correct manner and at the correct time.

Crop protection products are applied by farmers, their staff, or by contracting spraying companies. For all those involved, training and continuous information is crucial.

Furthermore, training is required for all those who advise on the use of crop protection products including distributors, extension services and local authorities.

Most users of crop protection products have undergone formal training in the early part of their careers, but there may be insufficient refresher training on new developments, best practices and environmental matters. This should also be considered in the future, as should the need to ensure that advisors also have the most up-to-date refresher training opportunities.

Training and refresher training for users and advisors on the use of crop protection products is a positive step to ensuring the sustainable use and this should be part of the Thematic Strategy.

In most countries law requires training. With different training systems in Member States, a Community framework must allow flexibility in the implementation of systems and the specific training requirements.

We strongly support the idea of a “recognised certificate of competence”.

In that case, methods of applications will improve if all professional users of crop protection products and advisors are required to undergo training and hold a certificate of competence.

In many countries, in addition to training systems, also systems for issuing recognised certificates for users and advisors are in place. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, these would need to be considered when proceeding with the idea of certification.

In this context we would like to recall that the crop protection industry has produced and still produces various training materials.

3.1.2 Regular technical inspection of application equipment

The environmentally safe operation of all CPP application equipment is a vital part of the CPP utilisation process.

HCPA believes that this is a key point to be addressed in the Thematic Strategy. Regular inspection of equipment is a real contribution to ensuring the sustainable use of CPPs and minimising potential environmental risks.

Regular inspections of equipment need to be considered as an option. However, the development and implementation of a system of universally acceptable, independently validated, low-cost testing schemes need to be discussed and agreed with the stakeholders involved (including equipment providers) at national level.

Standards for storage

Crop Protection Products should be stored in premises suitable for this purpose to prevent potential environmental and health risks.

HCPA believes that in addition to the suggested measures, a concept of minimum standards for the storage of crop protection products needs to be put in place at wholesale level, retail level and on farm.

3.1.3 Promotion of good practices and integrated farming systems including ICM

The crop protection industry has been at the forefront of those advocating the use of good agricultural practices as well as Integrated Crop Management practices.

The Integrated Crop Management (ICM) techniques, including Integrated Pest Management (IPM), have already had a major impact on improving farm practices, especially crop protection practices. The crop protection industry believes that ICM is the cornerstone for sustainable farming systems. Systems using ICM techniques can meet the three criteria of sustainable development in agriculture (economic viability, social acceptance and environmental friendliness).

Although there are a range of definitions of ICM being used by various institutions in the EU, they are fairly similar and have the main aspects in common by saying that ICM is an environmentally sensitive and economically viable production system or process which uses all the available techniques to produce high-quality food in an efficient manner.¹

It is not a means solely to be defined for reducing the use of pesticides but applying best practices on farm.²

As there seem to be some misperceptions still, we strongly feel there is a need to improve communication giving the real facts of integrated farming, ICM and IPM and also other systems of production such as organic. The Commission has an important role to play in supporting such information initiatives.

¹ CEAS Report on Integrated Crop Management Systems in the EU carried out for DG Environment.

² One example illustrating the different aspects of ICM is the Codex on Integrated Farming recently published by the European Initiative on Sustainable development in Agriculture (EISA). This Codex was also recognised in the CEAS Report on Integrated Crop Management Systems in the EU carried out for DG Environment.

3.2 Comments on other measures suggested within the Communication

3.2.1 Establishment of national plans to reduce hazards, risks and dependence on chemical control

Crop protection is a fundamental need – whichever technique is used. Many alternatives to crop protection products themselves have environmental risks associated with them. For instance, weed control without the use of crop protection products requires the use of additional mechanical control or other physical methods, which can lead to soil compaction and erosion.

HCPA strongly believes that the focus of any kind of plan should be on appropriate risk reduction measures. By contrast we oppose any plan aimed at an arbitrary (quantitative) reduction of the use of crop protection products. A reduction in CPP use will not automatically achieve environmental improvements and the risks of other approaches should not be ignored.

HCPA also feels that plans to reduce risks would be best placed at the national level. The respective authorities are best positioned to identify the most appropriate measures to be taken, adapted to national, regional or local needs.

We are concerned that an inappropriate link is made between the overall objective of reducing potential risks associated with the use of CPPs and measures aimed at reducing dependence on chemical control (CPPs).

Chemical control plays a role in today's agriculture production. Farmers purchase and use crop protection products to ensure yield and prevent quality losses due to pests and diseases, and thus to ensure the viability of their farms. They see benefits in using crop protection products among the other available measures to protect their produce, and one should not by arbitrary measures prevent farmers from making their own management decisions, but ensure that crop protection products are used in a responsible way.

The HCPA Position on proposals for use reduction measures is attached to this document.

3.2.2 Implementation of Water Framework Directive (WFD), including the introduction of best practices in river basin management such as mandatory field margins or specific agreements between water companies and farmers

The crop protection industry is a highly committed partner in the ongoing process implementing the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

While by subsidiary the Commission basically will provide common legislation, definitions and strategies and also will introduce the river basin as the administrative unit, the managing unit defining specific pressures and measures will be the local River Basin Management Authorities. This strategy will allow for tailored and most cost-effective and proportionate local approaches.

We would wish that the Thematic Strategy should explicitly recognize and integrate the fact that new measures related to water are already in the process of being implemented via the Water Framework Directive, and in practical terms they will be selected based on local requirements. Care needs to be taken to ensure that this new WFD approach is in no way jeopardised by the Thematic Strategy. HCPA agrees to close co-operations between the farmers and the water industry. In addition, the

concept of buffer zones has long been implemented via the European and national legislation resulting from the Directive 91/414/EEC.

3.2.3 Increase the protection of environmentally sensitive (*NATURA*) areas by reducing the overall use of CPP and defining areas of zero use

NATURA areas are sensitive areas and their protection needs to continue. However there are many different areas of protection with different types of current practices to maintain them.

Many of these areas have been established due to traditional practices. Often the use of CPPs has assisted in protecting these areas. Any change in traditional practices could damage the current balance.

CPPs are often needed within sensitive (*NATURA*) areas to control invasive pests (e.g. bark beetles) that otherwise would threaten the protected species or biodiversity.

While there might be a potential for some areas of zero CPP use, this does not apply to all the *NATURA* areas per se.

The choice and implementation of specific measures to protect *NATURA* areas should remain in the competence of the Member States, where the local situation can best be analysed and appropriate measures been taken.

3.2.4 Ban of aerial spraying

With regard to the proposal for a general ban of aerial spraying, HCPA feels it is important to consider that there are some areas where aerial spraying cannot be replaced by other techniques of crop protection. For those the possibility of aerial spraying would need to be maintained. Forests or slopes are areas where crop protection is in some cases needed and aerial spraying is the only possible technique. One can imagine that alternatives such as handheld application would not be suitable nor cost-effective.

HCPA believes that derogations from a general ban are necessary and economic considerations, as well as environmental considerations, need to be taken into account when defining these.

3.2.5 Initiation of mid to long-term epidemiological research on CPP users at risk

HCPA welcomes further scientific research efforts, and suggest these studies to clearly distinguish between the effects of CPP use and other influences in order to deliver sound scientific results.

3.2.6 Investigation and monitoring programmes on pesticides residue levels for consumers (with particular emphasis on groups of the population at particular risks) & research in methods to assess chronic and acute risks from residues to infants and children when establishing Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs)

Hellenic CPA believes that the existing residue monitoring programmes on pesticide residue levels on food commodities need to be better co-ordinated within the European Union. Sample collection and selection, data generation and reporting have to be done in a harmonised manner in order to ensure a high quality and comparability of the results throughout all Member States.

Perceived potential risks to consumers and lack of data need to be considered for the selection of commodities and residues to be analysed. However potential risks to all consumer groups need to be taken into account.

With regard to assessing acute and chronic risk, HCPA strongly supports the development of new and harmonised scientific methodologies for refined approaches to risk assessment (e.g. Probabilistic Risk Assessment).

At the European Workshop on Acute Dietary Risk Assessment, participants (including national and European regulators and scientists) concluded that the lack of appropriate consumption data for various population groups (e.g. elderly, adults, children) is the biggest hampering factor to assess risks to consumers. Further research is necessary in this area to create a suitable database and refine risk assessment and MRL setting.

3.2.7 Collection of data on incidences

HCPA supports a better co-ordination of reporting systems and scientific analyses of the data on incidences to improve knowledge on areas of potential risks. For a proper risk assessment it needs to be ensured that the data collected is directly and unambiguously linked to the exposure of CPPs.

3.2.8 Collection and analysis of economic data on CPP use (costs and benefits) and alternatives

The use of crop protection products brings benefits and they are used for many different reasons. Without crop protection products, our farmers would quickly find their crops infested, diseased, unattractive and therefore unmarketable. The competitiveness of the Greek agriculture and consequently the European agricultural production and the stability of high quality food supply at affordable prices would be threatened.

While HCPA has recognised that several benefits of crop protection products have been outlined in the Commission Communication, it is felt that this does not give a full picture.

We believe that the benefits of CPPs need specific attention and further research will be necessary to bridge existing knowledge gaps.

This is particularly important given that some still argue for quantitative use reduction measures without providing appropriate cost-benefit analysis and thus without understanding the consequences of such proposals.

In this context, HCPA would underline the results of a recent study that assessed the impact on the European food and agriculture sector of an imposed 75% reduction of crop protection products in the EU. The assessment calculated a 10 billion euro reduction in revenue for European farmers and the food industry, and a severe impact on European agricultural production with wheat and coarse grain production falling by around 40%, the production of oilseed by 50% and the production of fruits and vegetables by 32% on average.

3.2.9 Further research and development efforts into different areas

In its Communication, the Commission proposes further research and development in various areas (page 31, point d). In line with the general comments made, HCPA believes that the focus should be on scientific efforts that can contribute directly to the sustainable use of CPPs and thus on research linked to improving crop protection practices such as research in IPM/ICM techniques, best methods of application and solutions for potential point source contaminations.

Regarding further research in the methods to assess chronic and acute risk from residues to infants and children when establishing MRLs, please refer to the comments made under point 3.2.6.

3.2.10 Reporting of production, import and export quantities of CPPs and collection of CPP use data (per crop, product, area, etc.)

The costs and benefits of any suggested measure need to be considered against the objectives to be achieved. It should in particular be assessed whether the proposed measure is proportionate to the issues to be tackled.

HCPA supports the co-ordinated collection of relevant data. However, the proposed measure on further data collection is very demanding with regard to the practical implementation and involves significant costs and administrative burden for the whole chain including, manufacturers, farmers, importers and exporters.

Before embarking on such proposals, it is essential to clarify how the data helps in achieving the goals of the Thematic Strategy.

3.2.11 Reinforcement of the system based on article 17 of Directive 91/414/EEC (inspections / monitoring of uses and distribution of CPPs by wholesalers, retailers and farmers)

As the details and the scope of the measure are not identified, it is difficult to comment on this proposal at this stage. However, one needs to avoid any duplication of measures.

3.2.12 Mandatory requirements for systems of regular and safe collection (possible reuse and controlled destruction of CPP packaging and unused products)

The disposal of CPP packaging and containers is well regulated at national level, and several waste disposal and collection schemes are in place at national level.

Before embarking on any EU-wide mandatory requirements, the current situation needs to be analysed in more detail to take existing systems into account and avoid any duplication of efforts.

3.2.13 Amend Directive 91/414 to include the substitution principle

Preparatory work for a future revision of the Directive 91/414/EEC is already in hand.

Despite the fact that the Thematic Strategy should focus on the use phase and not overlap with existing legislation or its ongoing revision, we would like to provide the following comments.

Through the application of the review programme of existing active substances under Directive 91/414/EEC, the number of active substances authorised for use within the EU will be reduced from over 800 to around 300 by the end of 2003. This in itself is the biggest substitution most consequential process relative to CPPs ever carried out in the EU and its impact should be assessed before further regulatory substitutions are considered.

The application of Directive 91/414/EEC ensures that across the EU only active substances that meet high technical criteria on human health and environmental impact are approved in Annex I. With the application of Directive 91/414/EEC, the crop protection industry doubts that regulatory substitution would help meet the needs of consumers, agriculture or the environment.

Regulatory substitution would reduce the chemical diversity of pest and disease control options required for sustainable agriculture, where over-dependence on one type or class of chemical can result in resistance development.

HCPA believes that individual farmers and growers (with their agronomists) are the best people to assess the local conditions and select solutions to their specific crop/pest problems. By applying their judgement the environmental impact of crop protection products can be minimised.

While the concept of substitution is written into the Biocides Directive, its application has still to be tested and may be found wanting. In addition, it should be noted that crop protection product uses are much more varied than biocides, and the application of substitution at a regulatory level for CPPs could remove the most suitable chemical solution for certain pest/crop situations.

3.2.14 Encouragement of specific farming methods or farm management systems (page 33, point 4) and linking the “pesticides” issue to CAP measures

All human activities have some environmental impact. Agriculture is no different, and all farming methods have an impact on the environment. But it is extremely difficult to separate out the different effects of crop protection products from other practices such as cultivation, rotation and cropping patterns.

The crop protection industry recognises the need to assess carefully the potential risks from any agricultural practice and any material introduced into the environment, and will continue to work to further minimise these risks.

This also means that under the CAP and the agri-environmental measures, all practices need to be considered, not “pesticides” issues separately. This applies for the EU Member States as it should apply for the candidate countries.

We feel that solely favouring “the use of low input or pesticides free cultivation or organic” misses an important point. These practices also have negative effects, including environmental damage caused by increased mechanical soil cultivation. It can also be predicted that the need to increase the area under farming in order to compensate for the lower yields would negatively impact natural habitats.

HCPA is convinced that farming systems applying the principles of ICM have the greatest potential to meet the potentially conflicting challenges at farm level in a manner that balances food production, profitability, social responsibility and environmental care.

They offer the better solutions in guaranteeing sustainable production on the available soil that delivers adequate quantities of raw material and high-quality food at affordable prices to the consumers, and are thus the best way forward for sustainable agriculture.

In addition, as farmers see benefits in using chemical control among other available measures to protect their produce, one should not by arbitrary measures prevent farmers from making their own management decisions.

3.2.15 Proposal NOT to introduce a EU wide CPP tax or levy

We feel the Commission’s assessment of the potential of a tax or levy on CPPs to achieve the goals of the Thematic Strategy and the subsequent conclusion not to consider EU-wide taxes or levies is very

reasonable. The arguments for why a tax is not an appropriate tool to further reduce risks associated with the use of CPPs are outlined within the Communication itself.

Efficient risk reduction can be achieved through other approaches such as general improvement in user education and the adoption of Integrated Crop Management; measures which are suggested to be part of the Thematic Strategy.

We feel that any move towards a discussion on taxes at national level would be inappropriate in the light of the overall goal of achieving the sustainable use of crop protection products.

HCPA's position on taxes is attached to this document for reference.

3.2.16 Harmonisation of the VAT for Crop Protection Products

Measures to ensure the smooth functioning of the internal market are supported by industry. The harmonisation of the VAT to facilitate trade and establish a level playing field for all users of crop protection products is seen by HCPA as a positive step for doing so.

3.2.17 Development of indicators

Developing meaningful indicators is a complex task. Indicators should be based on risk rather than the amount of CPPs used or their mere presence in trace amounts.

Neither the volume used nor the application frequency necessarily correlate with the decrease in risks. If the quantity used is significant, the toxicity of the individual active ingredient and the way in which it is used will markedly influence risk.

Furthermore, the amount of input used would also need to be considered against the output.

Levels of crop protection usage are merely a reflection of the cropping pattern in the different locations. In Northern countries, typically a high value crop such as potatoes which is at extended risks from pests and diseases will receive four times the volume of active ingredient than a crop of spring barley would receive.

The use of a value figure is even more flawed than the use of a weight or volume. The price a farmer pays for a product bears no relationship to its toxicity or weight and reflects market conditions as well as competitive products' international business strategies, but does not measure environmental impacts.

This should be kept in mind when developing relevant indicators.

Furthermore we challenge the statement that the number of CPPs on the market is linked to risks. The number of CPPs on the market as such does not say anything about the risks associated with the use of CPPs. Apart from the risk of resistance build-up, if only a few number of CPPs remain on the market and the need for farmers to have solutions to solve specific pest problems on farm, the availability of a larger number of products allows farmers to choose the most appropriate product, taking into account the pest problem and environmental considerations.

It is today widely recognised that it is essential to consider whole farm systems, rather than single factors, such as CPPs, in isolation. Other factors, such as types of crops grown, planting time, soil cultivations practices and management of non-cropped areas often have a bigger impact on the environment than CPPs. The Commission should take this into account.

3.2.18 Candidate Countries

HCPA welcomes the Commission's intention to support candidate countries in tackling the handling of obsolete stocks.
