European Food Safety Authority

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

15 SEP 2015

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Mr. Thilo Bode
foodwatch
Brunnenstrasse 181
10119 Berlin
Germany

Subject: foodwatch petition regarding the renewal of the active substance glyphosate

Dear Mr. Bode,

I write to you regarding the petition that foodwatch launched on 5 August 2015 on the renewal of the EU authorisation for the active substance glyphosate. The petition was addressed to me personally and, if you allow me, I will use this letter to reply openly to all those who have signed up to your campaign and from whom I have received emails.

To date, the total number of emails I have received as part of the foodwatch petition stands in excess of 21,000. This is a significant number and not only confirms the large public interest in EFSA's work on glyphosate but also – more broadly – in the way in which pesticides are regulated and used in the EU.

While I am not yet in a position to communicate the results of EFSA's safety assessment of glyphosate (the work is due to be finalised and published on our website at the beginning of November), I am able to provide some explanation and reassurances with regards to the points raised in foodwatch's petition.

Firstly, I would like to clarify the role EFSA has in the EU regulatory process for pesticide authorisation. EFSA is an independent EU risk assessment body that provides a pre-market safety evaluation of active substances submitted for authorisation by industry. When EFSA has completed its safety evaluation, it provides the European Commission and Member State competent authorities – "risk managers" – with its advice in order to inform the decisions they take regarding authorisations. In this respect, EFSA's role is limited to scientific evaluation only; it does not authorise or ban pesticides for placement on the market, nor does it make recommendations about which pesticides to authorise or ban.

The separation of risk assessment and risk management in the EU regulatory system is a fundamental tenet of EU food law and ensures that scientific advice about food safety is given free from political or other bias. This distinction is also relevant in respect to one of the requests that foodwatch makes in its petition, namely that EFSA apply the precautionary principle in its handling of the glyphosate assessment.

As the Regulation you cite in your petition states, the precautionary principle "provides a mechanism for determining risk management measures or other actions" in order to safeguard public health[1]. As a tool for risk managers, and for the reasons I outline above about the need to ensure the independence of EFSA's scientific advice, the precautionary principle is not something that I or EFSA as risk assessor has the power to apply.

With respect to the request in the foodwatch petition that EFSA take into account the recently published paper by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) on glyphosate, I can indeed confirm that EFSA scientists are considering this paper in their assessment of glyphosate. In fact, EFSA requested an extension from the European Commission to its deadline on glyphosate to ensure that it had sufficient time to consider the IARC paper. When EFSA's glyphosate assessment is published, we will be careful to communicate clearly about how we appraised the IARC paper.

Finally, you refer in your petition to the need to ensure that our work on glyphosate is done in an objective and transparent manner. Please allow me to reassure you that EFSA's safety evaluation of glyphosate is being carried out independently and transparently to the highest level of scientific rigour. The renewal assessment report that was carried out by Germany, upon which we base our own evaluation, has been made available on our website and was launched for public consultation earlier this year. The results of this public consultation are being incorporated where relevant in EFSA's final conclusions.

I hope with this letter that I have gone some way to answering the points that foodwatch raises in its petition on glyphosate. I welcome any opportunity to explain EFSA's work to stakeholders and interested parties and so please don't hesitate to come back to me if I can provide any further information. From my side, I will ask my colleagues to ensure that you are kept regularly updated on the progress of the glyphosate assessment and, of course, that we notify you as soon as the conclusions are available.

Yours sincerely,

Bernhard Url

cc: J. Kleiner; J. Tarazona; L. de Luca (EFSA)

[1] Article 21, Regulation (EC) No 178/2002