



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## DANGEROUS CHEMICALS A THREAT TO FAMILIES AND ENVIRONMENT: REPORT

Australian Parliament urged to pass laws requiring ongoing registration of pesticides

**Childhood illnesses, cancer and other conditions may be happening under our noses as a result of the ongoing use of dangerous pesticides in Australia, the National Toxics Network and WWF-Australia said today.**

The groups today released a report, *Human Health Impacts of Exposure to Pesticides*, which pulls together a compelling scientific case that the same pesticides pushing along the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef are also linked to a raft of illnesses in humans.

It comes as the Australian Parliament is debating legislation that would finally see Australians and the Australian environment receive the same level of protection from unmanageable chemicals as Europeans and North Americans.

National Toxics Network spokesperson Jo Immig said Australia's current pesticides laws are outdated.

"Australia's children are still being exposed to many chemicals that have been discontinued elsewhere around the world," Ms Immig said.

"Today's report tells us that many of the chemicals that are available for use in Australia are not only a risk to our environment, but are also putting at risk our farmers, their partners and children with links to illnesses like brain cancer and leukaemia."

WWF-Australia spokesperson Nick Heath urged the Australian Parliament to ensure new legislation regarding pesticide registration is passed into law as soon as possible.

"If all dangerous pesticides stayed in the paddock there would not be such a problem for our environment and the Great Barrier Reef," Mr Heath said.

"But some of these pesticides cannot stay in the paddock even with the absolute best will, best techniques and best technologies on the farm. So, for that small number of pesticides, we need stronger laws, and we need them now.

"We can't afford to wait any longer. We're calling on all Members of Parliament to ensure these draft laws become a reality as soon as possible."

The *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Legislation Amendment Bill 2012* is currently being debated by the House of Representatives.

The full text of *Human Health Impacts of Exposure to Pesticides*, a review of scientific literature commissioned by WWF-Australia, can be found at [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au).

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This release and associated material can be found on  
[www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au) | WWF-Australia (World Wide Fund for  
Nature Australia) ABN: 57 001 594 074

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The full text of Human Health Impacts of Exposure to Pesticides, a review of scientific literature commissioned by WWF-Australia, can be found at [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au).

Key points from the report:

- The group at greatest risk from exposure to pesticides are children.
- Children are exposed before they are born, as pesticides absorbed by their mothers cross the placenta and are taken up by the foetus.
- Infants are then exposed again when they are breast fed, for a wide range of pesticides are commonly found in breast milk.
- Maternal exposures, but also paternal exposures pre-conception, including both occupational and household exposures, are associated with [childhood] leukaemia and brain cancer (Infante-Rivard & Weichenthal 2007; Lyons & Watterson 2010; Van Maele-Fabry et al 2010).
- A large international study across seven countries identified an association between childhood brain tumours and maternal farm exposure to pesticides during the five years preceding the diagnosis (Efrid et al 2003).
- There is evidence that a number of the pesticides found in the Great Barrier Reef waters and in waterways discharging into the area may cause cancer (e.g. atrazine, 2,4-D, diuron, simazine), neurological conditions (chlorpyrifos), birth defects (atrazine, 2,4-D, diuron, endosulfan, MCPA), reduced foetal growth (atrazine, chlorpyrifos, 2,4-D, metolachlor), and metabolic problems leading to obesity and diabetes (chlorpyrifos).
- Foetal and early childhood exposures to pesticides are a key concern, with considerable evidence of links between such exposures to a wide variety of pesticides and a range of childhood cancers, especially brain cancer and leukaemia.
- Prenatal exposure, particularly to organophosphate insecticides, is strongly linked with a range of developmental, cognitive and behaviour deficits, that can result in lasting adverse effects on the brain and leading to what has been described as a “silent pandemic” of developmental neurotoxicity.
- Prenatal exposure is also strongly linked with a range of birth defects.
- Exposures to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) during these early life stages can have permanent and irreversible effects, with severe health consequences throughout childhood and into adulthood, and even for subsequent generations