

## **Senate Estimates February 2019**

### **Dr Chris Parker (APVMA) – Opening Address**

In 2018, we finalised around 3,500 applications for chemical actives, products, and permits. Each of these is a product in the hands of crop producers, pest controllers, gardeners, veterinarians and graziers.

Our work hinges on making science-based decisions to ensure agvet chemical products are safe for the community and environment, and effective for users.

One of my key focuses has been on improving the APVMA's ability to meet legislative timeframes. Since late 2017, we have had five quarters of improved performance, and we remain focused on keeping performance at a sustainable level as we manage the last stages of the relocation.

We look for efficiencies where we can, and one avenue is the use of assessments from trusted international regulators. In the 2017–18 financial year, international assessments contributed to 34 component evaluations across chemistry, efficacy, environment, health and residue risk areas, up from 15 component evaluations the previous year.

To get the best out of our people, we have been investing in resources to assist them in their vital work.

We are making steady progress in implementing the objectives of the Digital Strategy. Major elements of this strategy have been settled through our Enabling Technology program.

In September 2018, we signed the contract for digitisation of the APVMA's 177,000 analogue and paper-based records. By the end of January, we had scanned over 17,000 paper files, and automated

loading of digital files to our records management system is now occurring.

In December 2018, we signed the contract for cloud-hosted infrastructure and ICT managed services. The vendor is already on-site and working to transition our IT infrastructure into the cloud before we commence operations from our new office in Armidale.

Transition to a cloud-hosted environment will allow the APVMA to improve our workflow and resource management functions.

Also in December, we renewed our contract for the APVMA's electronic document and records management system. The new contract ensures that we will continue our transformation to a fully digitally enabled regulator by 2020.

Our permanent Armidale office is drawing closer to completion. Work remains on schedule for us to occupy the building by mid-2019. The structure is finished, windows have been installed, and work has begun on the interior.

We have now started planning the phased transition of staff into the office.

Our recruitment activities have continued at pace. I've been very impressed with the quality of candidates for both our scientific and corporate roles.

There has been a focus from some quarters on what the APVMA has lost in terms of staff and experience and this is undeniable. However, as I have said at previous estimates the move has provided us with opportunities for renewal of the business. We have also gained some highly experienced and energetic individuals.

At January 31st, we had 72 staff in Armidale, and a further 18 staff will commence by the end of March.

By the end of March, there will be 39 regulatory scientists in Armidale, including those who have relocated from Canberra.

The Australian public and industry expect us to make science-based decisions for the good of the community and agricultural productivity. With a mix of around 40 experienced scientists and decision-makers in the Canberra satellite office and our qualified scientists in Armidale, I have every confidence that we will continue to get the job done.

Since last Estimates, we have reorganised our operating model to better align our post-market activities.

Our Chemical Review, Adverse Experience Reporting, Manufacturing Quality and Licencing, and Compliance and Monitoring functions have been combined under our new Chief Regulatory Scientist to allow a more holistic approach to our postmarket activities.

I've mentioned the experience we're attracting to the APVMA. However, we're also investing significantly in developing the regulatory knowledge of all our staff.

Our Chief Regulatory Scientist is delivering a comprehensive learning and development program focused on knowledge management and reinforcing a culture of quality across the organisation.

We're now at the stage in our operational planning where we need to have an eye to a financially sustainable future.

As you're aware, we are primarily a cost-recovered agency, through the collection of industry fees and levies, and we have begun work on a new Cost Recovery Implementation Statement, or CRIS.

As part of the CRIS, and for the first time, the APVMA is logging effort across our work areas and getting a clear understanding of the resources required to do our work. This work is just so important for us to set the organisation up with a sound financial footing for the

coming years whilst ensuring we have the resources to fully meet the expectations of the Australian community.

We expect our first consultations with stakeholders to take place next month.

The APVMA is very much an agency in transition, not just in its physical location but in its work practices. I remain optimistic that this transition is leading us towards a more efficient and effective APVMA into the future.

Thank you.