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Barnaby Joyce opens new pesticides office

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Dan McCulloch, Australian Associated Press



A temporary office for the federal pesticides agency being forcibly moved to Barnaby Joyce's electorate has been found, sharing premises with Centrelink and Medicare in regional NSW.

The deputy prime minister peeled back the sticker on the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority's new Armidale digs on Thursday afternoon.

Former APVMA chief Kareena Arthy, who quit last week amid tensions about the relocation, made headlines in February after revealing senior executives were working out of the local McDonald's restaurant while they searched for an office.

Mr Joyce argued the interim office was a stepping stone to creating a more resilient pesticides agency.

"An APVMA more strongly connected to its constituent groups, the people who use it, and also to engender a sense of growth in new areas of our nation at the same time," he told reporters in Armidale.

The deputy prime minister would not say how many regulatory scientists would be working from the interim office, nor when they might do so.

Neither would he say when a new APVMA chief executive would be appointed, saying the government would take its time to fill Ms Arthy's "very, very capable" shoes.

Senators investigating the controversial move have been warned about a loss of expertise as the government's pesticides body is moved from Canberra to northern NSW, with a host of senior scientists already resigning.

Ms Arthy said it would take up to five years after the 2019 move to reach a full complement of 150 scientists, with the agency experiencing higher than expected staff departures.

The deputy prime minister, who is also the Nationals leader, will within months order all federal departments to justify their ongoing presence in big cities or face relocation to rural and regional towns.

A template for ministers to assess which other public servants could also be uprooted will be developed by mid-year.

Ministers will be given until August to report back on which of their departments, functions or entities would be suitable to move, with each expected to "actively justify" why any agency is unsuitable for relocation.



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