Regulation of inhibitors used in agriculture

Summary of MPI Discussion Paper No: 2020/01.

The Ministry for Primary Industries wants feedback on potential options to alter New Zealand's current approach to regulating inhibitors used in agriculture. Consultation on *The regulation of inhibitors used in agriculture* closes on 27 March 2020 at 5pm. Your feedback will help ensure inhibitors are managed appropriately. We appreciate you taking the time to make a submission.

This short guide outlines why we are reviewing how inhibitors are regulated and proposes options for change. We recommend you read the full discussion document before making your submission.

Introduction

Inhibitors are potentially important tools for primary producers to improve environmental sustainability, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving water quality. This technology has exciting potential, but we need to make sure any use of inhibitors is well managed so that any potential risks to food safety, plant and animal health, and trade are minimised.

We are considering options to alter the regulatory oversight of inhibitors to mitigate these risks and ensure the level of regulation is sufficient.

There is limited use of inhibitors currently. We expect use of inhibitors to increase.

What are inhibitors?

While there is no legislated definition of an inhibitor, they are commonly considered to be compounds that reduce nutrient leaching or greenhouse gas emissions in some way. Examples include inhibitors applied to pasture to reduce nitrate leaching, and inhibitors added to feed to reduce methane emissions.

We want feedback on the definition of inhibitors. It's very important the definition is accurate, otherwise it could include products that are not of regulatory interest, or exclude products that are of regulatory interest.

Why are we doing this?

Inhibitors are potentially important tools for primary producers to reduce agricultural greenhouse emissions and nutrient leaching. This review is important to help realise opportunities and to avoid unintended negative impacts of inhibitors, ranging from those that could affect individual companies and users, through to those that could impact New Zealand's economy and international reputation.

MPI has identified options to alter the regulatory oversight of inhibitors so that the primary sector is better able to safely and effectively use inhibitors to mitigate environmental, sustainability and climate change issues. It also discusses some key details that must be determined should the level of regulatory oversight of inhibitors increase, e.g. the definition of inhibitor.

Proposed options for the regulation of inhibitors used in agriculture

We are seeking feedback on 3 options for managing inhibitors used in agriculture:

Option 1 – maintain the status quo – no change to how inhibitors are regulated. Involves the least compliance cost to industry and maintains current access to inhibitors.

Option 2 – increase industry management of inhibitors – a non-regulatory option. This would require those involved in selling inhibitors working with users to ensure there is sufficient information provided to manage risks to animal and plant health, food safety, and trade.

Option 3 – change the regulation of inhibitors – legal obligations would apply. Inhibitors would be identified as agricultural compounds and the risks managed by assessments under the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997.

We want your feedback on the following:

- Should regulatory oversight of inhibitors be increased?
- What is the most appropriate of the three options identified (or do you consider there is a better alternative)?
- What are the key regulatory settings should oversight increase?
- What are the impacts of any the identified options?
- Are there any potential unintended consequences of any of the proposed options?