



**Hon. Diane Evers MLC**  
Member for the South West Region

Attn: Ms Lauren Lesiti, Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Committee Members

**PETITION NUMBER 064 - PESTICIDES IN PUBLIC PLACES**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition No. 64 *Pesticides in Public places*. I confirm that I wish the Government/Committee to inquire into the matters raised in the petition. To the best of my knowledge, the issues described in this petition have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

I am particularly concerned with the use of pesticides to control weeds on footpaths, roads, verges and other high use public places such as children playgrounds and parks, with associated children's health, public health and environmental risks.

At present, there is a lack of definitive scientific knowledge of the full extent of the public health and environmental impacts of pesticide use. For instance, scientists continue to explore the health impacts of glyphosate. Glyphosate (GLY), found in the herbicide Roundup for example, acts by blocking an enzyme that produces an intermediate in the biosynthesis of amino acids. The enzyme is present in plants, bacteria and fungi, but not animals, a fact that has been used to support the argument that glyphosate cannot harm human health. However, researchers note that 'although exhibiting plant-selective toxicity, GLY-based herbicides might eventually impair human health through modes of action other than inhibition of (the) metabolic pathway'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, in March 2015 the World Health Organization (WHO) categorised glyphosate as probably carcinogenic to humans, and continues to rigorously defend this position<sup>2</sup>.

Scientists continue to research the environmental and human health impacts of pesticide use – an enormous task considering the number and cumulative nature of impacts of pesticide use that need to be determined over the short and long term. For instance, while a limited amount of research has been undertaken to study the associations between glyphosate and birth defects, abortions, pre-term deliveries, gestational date births, or childhood diseases, and has to date found no significant association between glyphosate and adverse pregnancy outcomes, researchers note that *epidemiological evidence was limited* to a few studies using non-quantitative and indirect estimates and dichotomous analysis of exposures' and that 'owing to methodological limitations of existing analytical observational studies, and particularly to a lack of a direct measurement...or an indirect estimation of exposure that has proven valid, these negative

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4895883/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/2016/glyphosate\\_IARC2016.php](https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/2016/glyphosate_IARC2016.php)



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findings cannot be taken as definitive evidence that GLY, at current levels of occupational and environmental exposures, brings no risk for human development and reproduction'<sup>3</sup>(emphasis added). Other researchers note that 'under present and expected conditions of use, Roundup herbicide does not pose a health risk to humans', which gives little comfort since it is likely to be applied incorrectly given its widespread use by non-expert practitioners<sup>4</sup>. This case study is indicative of the state of play in the science of pesticide use.

The petitioners observe that the Department of Health, Western Australia and the Western Australian Department of Local Government and Communities allow pesticides to be used in public places without adequate warnings to pedestrians. This means that families and community members are denied the right to decide for themselves what risks they are prepared to take in relation to exposure to pesticides. Failure to support this right is undemocratic.

The petitioners also note that the relevant State Government departments do not undertake adequate record keeping of the types, quantities, efficacy or adverse experiences caused by their application. This is consistent with the assessment provided in the report *Management of Pesticides in Western Australia* released by the Auditor General in 2015, which noted a lack of legislative checks in relation to pesticide use. Given the changing landscape of scientific knowledge about the action and cumulative effects of pesticides in complex systems, this is unacceptable.

In Western Australia, we are using pesticides without sufficient knowledge of the associated risks, and certainly without the full confidence of the community whose health may be impacted. Therefore, the State Government should invoke the precautionary principle in legislation, regulation and policy governing the use of glyphosate and other pesticides in Western Australia to protect the public and the environment from harm<sup>5</sup>.

I support the substance of Petition No 064, and support the petitioners' claims including the need for the State Government to:

- suspend the use of herbicides registered as scheduled poisons under the Health Act (WA);
- audit the use of scheduled poisons and remove permissions to use those pesticides that are banned overseas, are endocrine disrupting chemicals or are listed as suspected or known carcinogens, mutagens, developmental and/or reproductive toxins; and
- seek safer alternative weed control.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Diane Evers MLC  
**Member for South West Region**  
**11 June 2018**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4895883/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10854122>

<sup>5</sup> The precautionary principle has four central components: taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty; shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity; exploring a wide range of alternatives to possibly harmful actions; and increasing public participation in decision making.