

Submission on Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill

15 June 2026

To: Primary Production Select Committee

Name of Submitter: New Zealand Vegetable Council

About New Zealand Vegetable Council

The New Zealand Vegetable Council (NZVeg) is a pan-vegetable sector organisation established to provide a unified voice for the New Zealand vegetable industry. NZVeg represents growers, packhouses and exporters producing and selling vegetables. Our members grow vegetables using a wide range of outdoor and greenhouse production systems.

The New Zealand vegetable sector produces approximately 1.2 million tonnes of vegetables annually, generates approximately \$1.1 billion in farmgate returns, employs around 9,600 people, and contributes significantly to domestic food security. The sector includes approximately 980 mostly family-owned growing businesses operating across 40,000 hectares of outdoor production and 320 hectares of greenhouse production.

Vegetable growers operate in one of New Zealand's most intensive production environments. Access to effective crop protection tools is essential to maintaining crop yields, product quality, food security, and grower profitability.

About the New Zealand Vegetable Sector

The New Zealand vegetable industry at a glance:

- 1.2million tonnes of vegetables produce each year
- \$1.1billion in annual farmgate returns
- 980 mostly family-owned growing businesses
- 9,600 employees
- 40,000 hectares of outdoor production
- 320 hectares of greenhouse production
- \$275million in fresh vegetables exports
- \$469million in processed vegetable exports

The sector operates a variety of growing systems including outdoor arable systems through to sophisticated glasshouses managing temperature and humidity.

The availability of vegetables at affordable prices depends on growers maintaining productive and resilient farming systems. Pest, disease, and weed pressures can have significant impacts on yields, quality, and supply. Access to crop protection tools therefore has consequences not only for growers but also for consumers and the wider economy.

NZVeg believes the HSNO framework should recognise the importance of domestic food production and food security when considering approvals, reassessments, and regulatory settings that affect access to crop protection tools.

Executive Summary

The New Zealand Vegetable Council wishes to be heard on our submission by the select committee.

New Zealand Vegetable Council (NZVeg) supports the submission made by Horticulture New Zealand in its entirety and does not seek to repeat the matters raised in that submission. Instead, this submission focuses on several issues of particular importance to commercial vegetable growers and proposes amendments that NZVeg believes would strengthen the Bill and improve its practical operation.

This Bill and the accompanying ACVM Bill are of utmost importance to the New Zealand vegetable sector. Due to the nature of the industry having many small niche crops, the industry is not attractive for multi-national companies to invest resources in to register new products in New Zealand. For example, we have five globe artichoke growers, for a multinational to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars, for a very small market, simply doesn't make sense. There needs to be a pathway forward where we can continue to produce vegetables affordably in New Zealand.

NZVeg supports the overall direction of the Bill but believes there are refinements required to get practical improvements for our members. These include greater use of international assessments, risk-proportionate pathways, accountability for regulatory performance, and temporary approvals. This bill is critically important to our sector and growers. It directly impacts on resistance management, food security, biosecurity preparedness, and control of pests and diseases for minor crop challenges.

NZVeg's view is that the success of the reforms should be measured not by process changes alone, but by whether growers gain timely access to safe and effective tools while maintaining New Zealand's high standards for environmental protection, worker safety, food safety, and market access.

As the vegetable sector is comprised of many minor crops, we are one of the most exposed sectors due to the cost of bringing in new crop protection products. In other words, the economics don't stack up to bring in new products if there are significant barriers, for limited use. These proposed reforms couldn't come soon enough for our sector, which is facing greater resistance build up, productivity losses and reduced confidence from our members to plant crops. If we can improve crop yields and production, we will see increased productivity and overall lower cost of vegetables through to the consumer.

We understand that this is an extremely difficult balance to get right and are encouraged by the reforms within EPA leading to a cultural change, which supports economic outcomes as well as environmental. We acknowledge that a lot of these system changes within EPA, are not visible to the outside world, or will be reflected in legislation, but are important and likely to have greater impact changes in legislation.

Risk-Proportionate Regulation and Exposure

NZVeg supports the Bill's emphasis on risk-proportionate regulation. However, NZVeg considers that the concept of risk should be expanded beyond the characteristics of a product itself. I.e. risk is determined by both hazard and exposure. The quantity used, application method, scale of use, containment, frequency of application, and likely exposure pathways all influence the actual level of risk presented by a product.

NZVeg is concerned that products with very different exposure profiles may still face similar regulatory burdens. This is particularly relevant for seed treatments, greenhouse applications, nursery production systems, contained environments, biological products, and products used only in emergency biosecurity responses.

NZVeg recommends that EPA be required to explicitly consider application method, quantity used, scale of use, frequency of use, containment measures, stewardship controls, and exposure pathways when determining approval pathways and regulatory requirements.

With the cost of bringing in a new products costing hundreds of thousands, there is not a viable pathway for some of our boutique crops. i.e. to bring in a product for silver beet, which may only require 10's of litres a year it is not commercially viable. As such, the crop protection company will never register the product for the silver beet growers.

Recommended Amendment:

Require EPA to consider both hazard and exposure when determining regulatory pathways and controls.

Resistance Management as a Public Benefit

NZVeg believes resistance management is one of the most important issues currently facing vegetable growers. Modern vegetable production relies on access to multiple modes of action. The ability to rotate products and integrate different control tools is fundamental to preserving the effectiveness of crop protection products over time.

The Bill does not appear to explicitly recognise resistance management outcomes when approvals and reassessments are considered. This is significant for our sector where we have so many minor crops, which are not able to access the appropriate chemistry.

Where products are removed or delayed, growers may be forced to rely on a single product. This increases selection pressure and accelerates the development of resistance. Once resistance develops, growers may lose access to entire chemistry groups.

The consequences extend beyond individual growers. Resistance can increase production costs, reduce food production capability, increase environmental pressure, and undermine the sustainability of production systems.

For example, onions have faced resistance issues for *Stemphylium* leaf blight. It has at times destroyed 40% of the crop, although there have been other contributing factors to this as well. Research conducted by Onions New Zealand found that *Stemphylium* leaf blight had in fact developed resistance to some of the chemistry being used, and we had lost efficacy/ control. Although we have improved husbandry practices now and crop health, having a range of products is critically important to the longevity of the sector. If we lose 30-40% of the crop season to season, it is extremely difficult to be profitable.

Recommended Amendment:

Require EPA to consider resistance management, mode-of-action diversity, integrated pest management outcomes, and long-term sustainability impacts when assessing approvals and reassessments.

Biologicals and Lower-Risk Technologies

NZVeg supports the Bill's objective of improving pathways for lower-risk products.

Vegetable growers are increasingly adopting biological controls, microbial products, beneficial organisms, pheromones, and other lower-risk technologies. These products often support environmental objectives, residue reduction, resistance management, and retailer requirements.

Despite these benefits, approval systems remain heavily influenced by frameworks developed

for conventional chemistry. This can create costs and delays that are disproportionate to the risks presented by many biological products.

In the past, we have looked at bringing in biological control options for glasshouse production to manage pests without the use of pesticides. In the end, we determined it was not feasible after spending \$200,000+. We are also currently looking at registering PLUTEX® containing *Plutella xylostella* granulovirus into New Zealand. This is a virus which is targeted to diamond back moth. To date, we have invested \$700,000+ to get it to the stage of bringing it in for containment trials. These sorts of novel control options are genuine opportunities for the sector to move towards more biological and green opportunities but need enabling settings.

Recommended Amendment:

Establish dedicated pathways for biological and lower-risk technologies, supported by proportionate information requirements as referenced in the Horticulture New Zealand submission.

Biosecurity Preparedness and Response Capability

NZVeg considers that biosecurity preparedness and response capability requires stronger recognition within the Bill. The ability to respond rapidly to new pests and diseases is critical to New Zealand's biosecurity system. Delays in access to treatment tools can materially affect the likelihood of successful containment or eradication.

The recent hornet response demonstrated shortcomings in the practical operation of emergency approval pathways. Sulfur dioxide was identified as a necessary treatment tool, yet the approval process took many months. By the time approval was granted, the active response phase was largely complete.

NZVeg is also concerned about future preparedness for threats such as Brown Marmorated Stink Bug. Existing response plans rely on access to key products. Reassessment decisions, commercial decisions by suppliers, or lengthy approval processes could reduce New Zealand's ability to respond effectively.

As an example, bifenthrin is being reviewed currently in New Zealand. If it is recommended by the Ministry for Primary Industries for use on Brown Marmorated Stink Bug if there was an incursion. So bifenthrin could be unavailable in NZ when there is an incursion of Brown Marmorated Stink Bug which would be really unfortunate.

Recommended Amendments:

- Statutory fast-track pathways for products identified in approved biosecurity response plans.
- Explicit consideration of biosecurity response capability during reassessments.

- Greater reliance on trusted international approvals during emergency responses.

Minor Crops and Registration Economics

Vegetables are minor crops in New Zealand. In other words, we don't use a lot of land for the various vegetable crops we grow. What this means is products need to be registered with a small market/ payback for the registrars.

As a result, growers often have access to fewer products than their competitors in larger jurisdictions. This issue becomes increasingly important as older products are reassessed, and resistance pressures increase. While the Bill improves flexibility, it does not directly address the economics of minor crop registrations.

As an example, movento is registered in Australia for onion thrips, but not in New Zealand for onions. Movento is an IPM friendly product for the control of thrips (i.e. does kill all of the beneficial insects as well). We can use it in New Zealand currently, but it has to be off label. This difficulty here is that some of our private customers, such as international supermarkets, don't recognise off label usage. As such, our preference is to be able to register it here in NZ for the use on onions and other vegetable crops.

Whole-of-Government Coordination

Growers experience the regulatory system as a whole rather than as individual agencies. The Department of Conservation plays an important role in biological control agent approvals and implementation. WorkSafe requirements relating to worker exposure, withholding periods, re-entry intervals. As well as the Resource Management Act, Local and Regional Councils. The operational restrictions can significantly influence whether a product remains practical to use.

NZVeg recommends greater coordination between EPA, MPI, DOC, WorkSafe and other agencies to ensure intended benefits of reform are not undermined elsewhere in the system.

Recommended Amendment:

Establish formal inter-agency coordination and reporting mechanisms.

Accountability and Performance

NZVeg supports the Government's objective of improving approval timeframes and increasing access to products. However, growers remain concerned that many of the proposed benefits rely on implementation rather than legislative changes.

NZVeg believes stronger accountability measures are required to ensure the reforms deliver the intended outcomes.

Recommended Amendments:

- Annual reporting on approval timeframes.
- Reporting on application backlogs.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Require EPA to consider both hazard and exposure when determining regulatory pathways and controls.
2. Require EPA to consider resistance management, mode-of-action diversity, integrated pest management outcomes, and long-term sustainability impacts when assessing approvals and reassessments.
3. Establish dedicated pathways for biological and lower-risk technologies, supported by proportionate information requirements as referenced in the Horticulture New Zealand submission.
4. Statutory fast-track pathways for products identified in approved biosecurity response plans.
5. Explicit consideration of biosecurity response capability during reassessments.
6. Greater reliance on trusted international approvals during emergency responses.
7. Establish formal inter-agency coordination and reporting mechanisms.
8. Annual reporting on approval timeframes.
9. Reporting on application backlogs.

Conclusion

NZVeg supports the direction of the reforms and the recommendations by Horticulture New Zealand. However, NZVeg believes the Bill can be strengthened through targeted amendments that better recognise the realities of commercial vegetable production.

The reforms should ultimately be judged by whether they improve access to the tools required to produce food safely, sustainably, and competitively in New Zealand while maintaining appropriate protections for people and the environment.

For our members, this bill is one of the highest priorities to manage pests and diseases effectively, improve crop yields and overall confidence to invest in the sector. We are encouraged by the direction but believe we need to go further to get better outcomes for vegetable growers and New Zealanders.

NZVeg wishes to be heard by the select committee on our submission.