

To the Detriment of Human Health and the Environment: European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) Serves Interests of Monsanto and Pesticide Companies?

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Environmentalist Dr Rosemary Mason has just written [an open letter to the European Chemicals Agency \(ECHA\) Director of Risk Management Jack de Bruijn](#). In the letter, which cites numerous sources to support her arguments, Mason says evidence now suggests taxpayers' money has been used to shield Monsanto and other pesticides companies from liability and obstruct consumers' ability to prove damages.

Such an allegation might not come as much as a surprise for those who are already familiar with Mason's work. In the various open letters she has written to officials over the years, she has supplied pages of evidence to show how key figures and regulators have colluded with the industry to frame policies that support the bottom line of agrochemical companies to the detriment of human health and the environment.

In discussing the well-documented (by Mason in particular) fraud surrounding the (lack of) regulation of glyphosate (key active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup), she says to de Bruijn:

"The European Commission is clearly part of this glyphosate conspiracy. In that case, I have to reluctantly accept that ECHA must be an accessory to it."



Mason (picture on the right) notes that the ECHA Risk Assessment Committee (RAC) does

not classify glyphosate as a carcinogen, contrary to what the World Health Organization has suggested is the case; however, in her letter she offers evidence to show that glyphosate is not only toxic to humans but to aquatic life with long-lasting effects. She therefore asks de Bruijn:

“How can the BfR [German Federal for Risk Assessment – Rapporteur Member State for glyphosate assessment] , EFSA and the EU Commission re-authorize a chemical with such widespread use that is toxic to aquatic life?”

Glyphosate, agrochemicals and the impact on biodiversity

✖ Jack de Bruijn is presented with evidence highlighting invertebrate declines in Welsh rivers in 2016 of which agricultural run-off plays a major part. Aside from the effects of glyphosate, Mason also draws attention to other chemicals and substances, such as neonicotinoid pesticides, nanoparticles and pharmaceuticals, on water quality and ecology.

Neonicotinoids cause virtually irreversible blockage of postsynaptic nicotinic acetylcholine receptors (nAChRs) in the central nervous systems of insects. They also poison aquatic invertebrates, fish and birds.

Thanks to pollution, salmon and sea trout are already at critically low levels in certain Welsh waterways (Mason resides in Wales). A spokesman for Natural Resources Wales says the situation is approaching crisis point.

Mason then asks: Where have all the insects gone?

She refers de Bruijn to a study that shows a massive decline in insect abundance at more than 100 nature reserves in western Europe since the 1980s. It seems that grassland treated with herbicides and pesticide-coated seeds are a serious factor in this.

Agencies colluding with industry's 'crimes against humanity'

Jack de Bruijn is then informed about the findings of the five judges of the Monsanto Tribunal who agreed that Monsanto has violated human rights to food, health, a healthy environment and the freedom indispensable for independent scientific research. The judges also opined that ecocide should be recognised as a crime in international law and that human rights and environmental laws are undermined by corporate-friendly trade and investment regulation.

In an opinion issued on the 15th of March 2017 and related to the classification of glyphosate, the ECHA estimated that this product could not be classified as a carcinogen, as a mutagen or as toxic for reproduction. However, the Tribunal stressed that this classification does not take into account the risks of exposure, with residues found in food, drinking water and even in human urine.

Mason asks de Bruijn:

“Why did ECHA RAC conclude that the available scientific evidence did not meet the criteria to classify glyphosate as toxic to reproduction?”

Mason goes on to highlight how credible research is sidelined to come up with decisions that

would be to the liking of Monsanto.

She says:

“When carrying out the Renewal Assessment Report for glyphosate, BfR committed far more crimes against humanity than just scientific fraud: they intentionally allowed GTF [Glyphosate Task Force] to delete many papers worldwide that showed that glyphosate caused birth defects and cancers, and those that provided evidence of bioaccumulation.”

“BfR eliminated the work that Monsanto feared the most (apart from the rat feeding studies of Séralini and his colleagues that were reported by EFSA and Monsanto to be fraudulent) was that by Prof Andrés Carrasco and his team in Buenos Aires that showed that glyphosate caused malformations in amphibian and chicken embryos.”



De Bruijn is made aware that in 2015 the German government summoned Prof Dr Andreas Hensel (President of BfR) before the Committee on Agriculture and Food and accused BfR of scientific fraud by using GTF statistics. BfR stands “accused of endangering the population” and also of “intentional falsification of the content of scientific studies”.

Mason notes the statistical dodge employed by the German authorities to defend glyphosate was the subject of an explosive in-depth news report that aired on German TV last October (2015) in the midst of deliberations by EU authorities on whether to re-authorize the chemical.

Do we want to replicate the devastation in South America?

In addition to having described the devastating effects of agrochemicals in the UK and Europe in her [various highly-detailed and fully-referenced documents](#), Mason informs de Bruijn about the trail of disasters to human health and the environment that has followed the planting of GM maize and Roundup Ready crops in both Latin America and the US since they were first grown in 1996.

Mason asks whether we want to ignore research (like Seralini’s, for instance) just because it offends the industry and thus end up with similar disasters in Europe?

Over the last 20 years, industrial agriculture in Argentina has expanded by almost 50%, taking over regions intended for other production, including forests. Mason notes that more and more children are being born with defects in these areas, especially if the first months of pregnancy coincide with the time of spraying. Down’s syndrome, spina bifida, myelomeningocele (neural tube defect), congenital heart disease, etc. are diagnosed more frequently in those areas; in some towns and during some years, at triple the normal rates, and directly linked to increased pesticide applications around the towns.

Mason refers to a report that says the model of agricultural production foisted on Argentina by international biotechnology companies has led to an 858% increase in the amount of pesticides used per year. Glyphosate is the most commonly used toxic agrochemical in Argentina, comprising 64% of total sales, and 200 million litres of glyphosate were applied during the last crop season.



Data is presented showing the rise in birth defects correlates with the rise in cultivation of GM glyphosate-tolerant soybeans in Chaco, Argentina. Birth defects per 10 000 live births increased from approx. 15/10,000 live births in 1997 to approx. 82/10,000 live births in 2008.

The point is that the very agrochemicals sector that is causing so much devastation elsewhere is the same sector that agencies or committees in Europe appear so keen to jump into bed with. A sector containing companies like Monsanto, which has more than 50 lawsuits against it in US District Court in San Francisco, filed by people alleging that exposure to Roundup herbicide caused them or their loved ones to develop non-Hodgkin lymphoma and that Monsanto covered up the risks.

Mason also draws de Bruin's attention to various documents which incriminate Monsanto in 'ghostwriting' documents and hiring academics to sign them.

Industry is "paralysing global pesticide restrictions"

In the Report presented to UN Human Rights Council about the Right to Food, Global Agricultural Corporations are severely criticised by Hilal Elver, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Mason informs de Bruijn that this recent report is severely critical of the global corporations that manufacture pesticides, accusing them of the "systematic denial of harms," "aggressive, unethical marketing tactics" and heavy lobbying of governments which has "obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions."

The report authored by Elver and co-authored by Baskut Tuncak, the UN's special rapporteur on toxins, says pesticides have "catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole," including an estimated 200,000 deaths a year from acute poisoning. The authors say:

"It is time to create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production."

The report states:

"Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility."

Although the pesticide industry argues that its products are vital for protecting crops and ensuring sufficient food supplies, Elver says "It is a myth."

Elver adds that using more pesticides is nothing to do with getting rid of hunger. She argues that, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), we are able to feed nine billion people today. Production is definitely increasing, but she says that the problem is poverty, inequality and distribution.

Is the ECHA fit for purpose?

According to its website, the ECHA's mission statement is as follows:

"ECHA is the driving force among regulatory authorities in implementing the EU's groundbreaking chemicals legislation for the benefit of human health and the environment as well as for innovation and competitiveness. ECHA helps companies to comply with the legislation, advances the safe use of chemicals, provides information on chemicals and addresses chemicals of concern."

Is the ECHA really up to the job? Or is "groundbreaking legislation... for innovation and competitiveness" a euphemism for kowtowing to the commercial interests of the industry?

Behind the public relations spin of the transnational agrochemicals and agrotechnology sector is the roll-out of a wholly [unsustainable model of agriculture](#) based on highly profitable corporate seeds and health- and environment-damaging proprietary chemical inputs.

But it doesn't have to be this way. [Numerous high-level reports](#) have suggested that organic farming and agroecology could form the mainstay of agriculture if they were accorded sufficient attention and investment. Unfortunately, big agribusiness players, armed with their chemicals or GMOs seek to marginalise effective solutions which threaten their markets and interests.

It is one thing to challenge the actions of these players, but it is another thing entirely for agencies to gain acceptance from corporations and by implication become a de facto compliant partner.

The report by Elver and Tuncak states:

"While scientific research confirms the adverse effects of pesticides, proving a definitive link between exposure and human diseases or conditions or harm to the ecosystem presents a considerable challenge. This challenge has been exacerbated by a systematic denial, fuelled by the pesticide and agro-industry, of the magnitude of the damage inflicted by these chemicals, and aggressive, unethical marketing tactics."

Elver says:

"The power of the corporations over governments and over the scientific community is extremely important. If you want to deal with pesticides, you have to deal with the companies."

The report recommends a move towards a global treaty to govern the use of pesticides and a shift to sustainable practice based on natural methods of suppressing pests and crop

rotation and organically produced food.



Agrochemicals are fueling disease and environmental destruction across the world and corporations need to be properly held account for their crimes and charges laid against them in an international court of law.

It must be hoped that officials pay attention to Hilal and Tuncak as well as numerous other high-level reports that have advocated a shift towards more ecologically sound models of agriculture.

And let us hope too that they also pay serious attention to the findings of the Monsanto Tribunal and the legal cases pending against Monsanto at this time. Whether politicians, bureaucrats, other senior figures or scientists-cum-lobbyists for the industry, those who collude with corporations to facilitate ecocide and human rights abuses could one day be made to answer for their actions in a court of law.

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