



**The  
Voluntary  
Initiative**

**Promoting responsible pesticide use**

# Annual Report 2014-15

Inside this report:

- 3 Chairmans' Reports
- 4 The VI and our Supporters
- 5 Priorities – water, biodiversity, meeting the sustainable use directive
- 8 Working with Other Initiatives
- 10 Key Measures and Indicators
- 11 The VI around the UK
- 12 The VI-CIC



# Chairmans' Reports

## Richard Butler VI Chairman

The last year was an important and eventful one for the Voluntary Initiative (VI). A strategic review was carried out by a group of our key sponsors. This examined the current activities of the VI, considered future challenges and then analysed requirements to meet these. The group recommended the appointment of an Operations Director as a full time staff member which led to the appointment of Rebecca Wells in April 2015. The review recognised the crucial role of the VI in water protection and Patrick Goldsworthy, our VI Manager for the last 12 years, is now our Water Quality Manager. Patrick's immense contribution to the VI now continues focusing on water stewardship.



The review group identified key priorities for the VI which are outlined later in this report. My personal thanks go to all of the group for their time and effort on this project which highlights the way forward for the VI over the next few years. Our work sits within the framework of wider national priorities and we await the results of Defra's review of the Water Framework Directive. We expect the results to recognise the VI's important role in delivering future improvements in drinking water quality.

The VI works closely with other industry-led initiatives to ensure we all provide the best possible advice to farmers and sprayer operators. The VI website highlights this work and promotes the Integrated Pest Management Plan developed by the NFU which has been well received by the industry.

Good stewardship programs are going to be essential in the future for the industry to retain active substances required for crop protection. The industry's 'Healthy Harvest' campaign has highlighted the dramatic loss of actives seen in recent years. The VI can, and I am confident that we will, play a vital role in helping farmers to respond to the challenges of producing food while impacting less on the environment.



## Andrew Moir VI Chairman for Scotland

Having just taken over as Chair of the VI group in Scotland it is quite clear to me that we must continue to engage with farmers and interested parties to showcase the benefits of responsible crop protection. We have a great story to tell; we take our responsibilities very seriously and by promoting best practice in all that we do we can demonstrate that the food we produce is safe and our soils, waterways, wildlife and air are healthy.

Using Integrated Pest Management Plans, for instance, goes a long way towards 'getting it right'; assessing pest and disease thresholds will minimise the resistance threat and help safeguard Plant Protection Products.

Our group in Scotland is working on waste management exemptions for bio-filters/ -beds, as well as waste and sustainable land management incentive schemes which are showing positive results, for example the grant scheme initiated by Scottish Water which assists farmers in making changes on farm to reduce pesticide levels in untreated drinking water. Such engagement is welcomed and we will continue working with stakeholders to improve practices on farm to aid water quality.

# The VI and our Supporters

The Voluntary Initiative (VI) is an industry-led partnership that works with government, regulators and stakeholders to promote the responsible use of agricultural and horticultural pesticides. Through its national groups the VI provides a UK wide framework for promoting best practice at the local level.

The VI Steering Group oversees and coordinates the work of the VI and keeps Ministers informed:

Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA)	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)	Food Standards Agency
Association of Independent Crop Consultants	Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF)
Assured Food Standards	National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC)
BASIS (Registration) Limited	National Farmers Union (NFU)
British Crop Production Council	Natural England
HSE, Chemicals Regulation Directorate	NFU Scotland
City and Guilds	Pesticides Action Network UK
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Crop Protection Association (CPA)	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland	The Scottish Government
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	Ulster Farmers Union
Environment Agency (EA)	Water UK
Farmers Union of Wales	Welsh Assembly Government

The aims of the VI have been agreed as follows:

- To ensure that industry demonstrates continued commitment to best practice in pesticide use within the context of Integrated Pest Management with the aim of minimising environmental impact and ensuring the availability of crop protection solutions in the future.
- For the VI to be seen as the centre of excellence on pesticide stewardship and best practice by government, industry and stakeholders.

Adherence to best practice in pesticide use results in:

- Reduced risk to the aquatic environment and improved compliance with the Water Framework Directive.
- Protection of pollinators and other farm wildlife.
- Reassurance for people living adjacent to sprayed crops, bee keepers and the general public that pesticides are being used safely.
- Confidence to consumers and retailers that food produced in the UK is safe.
- A reduced risk of further regulation or restriction on the use of pesticides.

# VI Priorities

The 2014 strategic review identified the following key priorities for the period up to 2018:

- The quality of water abstracted for drinking is the highest priority with a particular focus on herbicides used in oilseed rape and grassland as well as working with the metaldehyde stewardship group on this pertinent issue.
- Insecticide stewardship to reduce the risk to bees and other pollinators and potential restrictions on insecticide use. This links to Integrated Pest Management and the provision of advice and guidance on the use of a holistic approach to crop protection and farm biodiversity.
- National Action Plan (NAP) for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides – the VI is a delivery mechanism for the UK NAP, reviewing and improving current measures and/or developing new approaches.
- Integration of messaging with other initiatives to ensure consistency and avoid duplication.

## Strategic Priority

# Water

EU requirements on the quality of drinking water mean that water quality is the VI's top priority. Metaldehyde slug pellets pose a particular challenge as it is very difficult for existing water treatment processes to remove metaldehyde to the legal standard of 0.1ppb. In response a separate stewardship programme is being delivered through the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group's campaign 'Get Pelletwise', with which the VI cooperates.

Data from the EA for England 2014 shows that 15% of drinking water protected areas are at risk from pesticides, the slug pellet metaldehyde is identified as a significant issue, however herbicides used on oilseed rape and grassland also pose a threat. The VI has a central role in reducing the risk of pesticides reaching water and improving compliance in drinking water catchments; the VI Water Group brings together key stakeholders to share information and experience, to develop new solutions and to coordinate activities.



A key activity during 2014 has been to work with Defra on the Water Quality and Agriculture project which is looking at how the UK can best comply with the EU Water Framework Directive. Proposals on a targeted way of delivering reductions in the levels of oilseed rape herbicides have been developed by the Crop Protection Association, with the support of the VI. A decision from Defra on if and when this approach will be adopted is awaited.

In addition the VI Water Group is working closely with the Grassland Group, a joint initiative from the VI and the Pesticides Forum, to ensure that clear messages on water protection reach grassland farmers. The new requirements under the Sustainable Use Directive for all operators to be certificated and for mounted sprayers to be tested provides a good opportunity to raise standards.

A key delivery mechanism for VI water activities remains its strategic partnership with Natural England's Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF). More detail on this activity is provided on p9. River monitoring by the EA for seven full crop years shows that the VI together with CSF is delivering a 50% reduction in the overall pesticide levels in six test catchments in spite of significant challenges from the increased area of oilseed rape and associated herbicide use in the test catchments.



Low drift nozzles

The VI also works directly with water companies through its Catchment Support Service which provides weekly advisory text messages and weather bulletins and valuable data on long term trends in water quality. This service, which started in 2003, is being reviewed during 2015.

*Water companies across the UK are working to address diffuse pesticide pollution using catchment management solutions. The VI priority of achieving improved compliance for drinking water catchments provides the water industry with a key partner that helps translate our concerns into best practice advice for farmers. The initiatives focussing on oilseed rape and grassland herbicides are particularly welcome and will hopefully demonstrate that the catchment management approach can protect valuable drinking water sources while allowing farmers to continue using plant protection products.*



## Strategic Priority

# Biodiversity

Addressing the risk to bees and other pollinators, and the associated potential restrictions on insecticide use, is a strategic priority of the VI. During this period we have developed and launched the new Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPMP) to encourage a holistic approach to crop protection.

We integrate our efforts on pollinators and wider farm biodiversity with the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE). Working together, CFE, the VI and other industry initiatives have developed an online training module for BASIS farm advisors on pollinators to complete as part of their continued professional development. In parallel to this the initiatives also collaborated to deliver national pollinator workshops for farmers on habitat management, including encouraging the establishment of pollinator mixes alongside oilseed rape as well as the responsible use of pesticides. We have also produced a leaflet as part of the CFE farm management series focusing on crop protection. Along with our more detailed best practice advice on insecticide stewardship, these tools help farmers, sprayer operators and advisors adhere to the latest stewardship principles.



Buffer strip

*The Campaign for the Farmed Environment encourages farmers to manage land voluntarily for the environment. Working with the VI has been really import to ensure that consistent messages on crop protection are getting to farmers. The VI's network of regional speakers has been a valuable resource for us as it has meant we've been able to give farmers best practice pesticide stewardship advice as part of a number of our local events. Working with the VI we've produced a crop protection booklet, which completes our farm management literature portfolio.*

*Jim Egan CFE Chairman*

*The RSPB works with farmers across the UK to help them incorporate wildlife-friendly practices into their farming businesses. We see the VI's messages on best practice in pesticide stewardship as an important part of building environmentally and economically sustainable farming systems. The RSPB strongly supports the VI's continuing focus on*

*Integrated Pest Management: we believe that there is significant scope for greater adoption of IPM across all farming sectors, and that this is the best response to the pest management challenges farmers are facing.*



Buffer strip

*Ellie Crane RSPB*

Strategic Priority

# Sustainable Use Directive

The Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) aims to reduce the risks and effects of pesticide use to human health and the environment. Within agriculture and horticulture, the VI and its schemes provide delivery mechanisms which help meet many aims of the SUD and the UK's National Action Plan for the sustainable use of pesticides. SUD requires all Member States to encourage the uptake of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – economically and environmentally sustainable management of pests, weeds and diseases using cultural, chemical, physical and biological controls. To help meet this objective the NFU developed the IPM Plan for the VI. Since its launch in 2014 over 2.6 million hectares are now covered by IPM Plans. The Plan has also been adopted by Red Tractor farm assurance schemes.

One of the biggest effects of the SUD will be felt by farmers and growers who have previously been able to use professional pesticides under 'Grandfather Rights'. This derogation ends in November 2015 and the VI has been focusing its efforts on raising awareness of this change, particularly to those who use professional pesticides only occasionally such as many livestock farmers and smallholders. Everyone with Grandfather Rights must obtain a 'specified certificate' if they wish to use professional pesticides after November 2015. In November 2016 all mounted pesticide application equipment will need to hold a valid "MOT" type test certificate; the VI's National Sprayer Testing Scheme is currently the only recognised test. The majority of equipment in regular use is already tested voluntarily on an annual basis, but the rules may pose a challenge for occasional pesticides users.

## Working with Other Initiatives

As part of our aspiration to become a one-stop-shop for pesticide stewardship and best practice advice the VI has made a commitment to work with and champion other initiatives as appropriate in order to avoid confusing operators and duplicating resources.

### Nematicide Stewardship Programme



Nematicides are a vital tool for potato growers in tackling potato cyst nematodes, which are the biggest pest threat to the UK potato industry. The nematicide stewardship programme promotes best practice, helping to ensure nematicides are used responsibly. By March 2017 anyone applying nematicides must have completed the Industry Stewardship Training module. The VI supports this group and its objectives.

### Metaldehyde Stewardship Group [www.getpelletwise.co.uk](http://www.getpelletwise.co.uk)

Metaldehyde in raw water is a particular problem in catchments used as drinking water sources. The aim of the group is to promote and encourage best practice with metaldehyde slug pellets, to minimise environmental impacts and in particular protect water. The VI works closely with the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group to address these issues.





## Metazachlor Matters

Active substances like the oilseed rape herbicide metazachlor are increasingly under the spotlight. The focus of this company initiative is on agronomic best practice and changing on-farm practices to maintain the long term availability of metazachlor.



## Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use [www.thinkwildlife.org](http://www.thinkwildlife.org)



The VI has strengthened links with this campaign which promotes responsible use of rodenticides among all user groups including farmers. A new stewardship initiative for these products will be launched later in 2015.

## Catchment Sensitive Farming

The VI has had a Strategic Partnership (renewed annually) with Catchment Sensitive Farming since 2009. The partnership is supported by H2OK? Campaign which sponsors guest speakers at farmer meetings, seasonal media releases and topical briefing notes on the local environmental awareness tool WIYBY, Grandfather Rights and Biobeds; the partnership has also included agronomist workshops organised by AIC, an investigation into the potential for a contractor database and training courses for Natural England and Rivers Trust staff.



**A clear solution  
for farmers**  
CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

A weekly text messaging service and monthly water quality data collection service is also provided as part of the partnership.

## Campaign for the Farmed Environment [www.cfeonline.org.uk](http://www.cfeonline.org.uk)

As well as working in partnership on issues affecting pollinators and wider farm biodiversity, the VI has provided the CFE with speakers to aid local CFE delivery. These efforts are ongoing.



## Tried & Tested Professional Nutrient Management [www.nutrientmanagement.org](http://www.nutrientmanagement.org)



This initiative addresses the issues associated with nutrient management – particularly the use of manures and slurries; one of its aims is to help keep nitrates out of watercourses. As water protection is a key theme for both initiatives we work together where we can.

## Amenity Forum [www.amenityforum.co.uk](http://www.amenityforum.co.uk)

The Amenity Forum is the voice of its sector in relation to weed, pest and disease control and its membership includes all aspects of this diverse and important sector. Through its activities, it seeks to promote and encourage proper and responsible use of both pesticides and integrated methods. It does this through running events, publishing guidance notes, operating a website and co-ordinating and encouraging the establishment of sustainable qualifications, training and CPD activity.



# Key Measures and Indicators

## National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO)

NRoSO is a VI scheme managed by City and Guilds. It is a central register of sprayer operators using Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a means of ensuring ongoing training to uphold best practice. From November 2015 all those using professional pesticides will need to have gained a certificate of competence to demonstrate safe use. Although there is a specific certificate that can be taken by those whose grandfather rights are ceasing, many are opting to take the full award and NRoSO has seen an increase in membership.



## National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS)

The NSTS is a VI scheme that is managed by the AEA. From November 2016 certain types of pesticides application machinery will need to be regularly tested to comply with the Sustainable Use Directive. In the last year 15,290 sprayer tests were carried out as part of the NSTS by a team of 624 examiners. 58.9% of sprayers tested needed repairs or rectifications in order to pass the test; leaks and drips were the most common faults. During this period NSTS held update training for examiners and carried out 108 audits to observe tests.



## Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPMP)

The VI's IPMP is was developed by the NFU and replaces the crop protection management plan. Their adoption by farmers and growers meets a commitment we made to the Government to promote understanding of the principles and practices of integrated pest management to help implement the SUD. The plan is a requirement of Red Tractor farm assurance for the crop sector. LEAF also provides a plan as part of their member's annual audit. During 2014 the VI agreed, after some modifications to their checklist, that Conservation Grade farmers were also fulfilling the IPMP. The plan helps ensure economically and environmentally sustainable management of pests, weeds and diseases using a range of cultural, chemical, physical and biological controls. These plans are used by 9,400 farmers approximately covering more than 2.6 million hectares. Of these figures the LEAF Sustainable Farming review accounts for 358,432ha and Conservation Grade accounts for 34,400ha.



Indicator	Before the VI	2013	2014	2015
<b>NRoSO members</b>	0	20,960	21,169	21,672
<b>NSTS (% of sprayed area)</b>	Estimate 5%	89.2%	94.4%	94.8%
<b>Crop protection management plans (now expired)</b>	0	583,271ha		
<b>IPMP (since 2014)</b>	0			2,664,652 ha

# VI around the UK

As well as the national Steering Group, Strategy Group and Water Group the VI has active regional networks across the UK. Raising awareness of the cessation of 'grandfather rights' has been a priority for all.

The Water Catchment Partnership (WCP) is the delivery group in **Northern Ireland** to address water quality issues. Since its inception in 2013 it has focused on tackling issues with grassland pesticides in specific catchments and in assisting the agricultural and amenity sectors in how they can help by following best practice when using pesticides. The Partnership has produced a number of Northern Ireland specific resources including a leaflet focussing on grassland weed control and protecting the water environment.

In **Wales** the farming unions have been highlighting concerns about grassland herbicides, working with Welsh Water to address a particular problem with the grassland herbicide MCPA being detected at water abstraction points. The Farmers Union of Wales met with the VI twice and have agreed to join the VI. Staff from Welsh Water attended a VI training course to find out more about the practicalities of pesticide application in agriculture.



In **Scotland** the VI group, chaired by Andrew Moir, continues to work closely with SEPA and Scottish Water on their respective priorities – diffuse pollution priority catchments, of which there are 14, and the sustainable land management initiative. The group is developing a Scotland specific Integrated Pest Management Plan.

With a particular focus on **England and Wales**, the VI and Pesticides Forum have joined with the levy bodies, farming unions, water companies and chemical companies to form a Grassland Group. This group focuses on issues facing the grazed and forage crop sectors.

During 2014 a grassland sector survey was carried out which showed that nearly 90% of respondents sprayed grassland every year. While the survey showed a good awareness of the ending of Grandfather Rights, only 1/3 of those eligible for Grandfather Rights had already done something about this. Of those yet to address this issue 40% were planning to get certificated, 20% will switch to using a contractor, while 26% are yet to make any firm plans on how they will deal with the changes. The Grassland Group has been addressing these concerns, including through the production of targeted resources such as a grassland weed control guide, knapsack spreader dos and don'ts and cards highlighting the options for the end of Grandfather Rights.

## Regional uptake of VI schemes

Region	NSTS tests	NRoSO members	IPMP (ha)
England	13719	18570	2,523,545
Scotland	1209	2319	89,875
Wales	209	603	11,568
Northern Ireland	77	176	5,264




# The Voluntary Initiative

Promoting responsible pesticide use

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 Follow @StewardshipVI

## The Voluntary Initiative Community Interest Company

The Voluntary Initiative registered with Companies House as a Community Interest Company (The VI-CIC) in 2009, giving it a formal legal identity. The VI-CIC has 10 directors, including representatives from each of the eight organisations that sponsor the VI:

