their reviews more efficiently, Ms Pease said. "We want to be protective," she added. "We are not interested in just reducing numbers, we are interested in focusing our resources on the species that actually need and deserve protections."

Industry representatives on the PPDC welcomed the suggestion that the EPA supports their request to rework the evaluations. The findings that the vast majority of species are likely to be adversely affected "doesn't bear any relationship with what we see in the field", said Ray McAllister, senior director of regulatory policy with CropLife America. "These products have been used for decades and we don't see declines in those species. I think it is worthwhile to re-evaluate."

Gabrielle Ludwig, director of sustainability and environmental affairs at the Almond Board of California, noted that the EPA's evaluations are based on new methods and said that the Agency should be afforded more time to get things right. "For those of you who think this is finished science, it really isn't," Dr Ludwig said. "There is a lot of new stuff here. This is really complicated and having legal deadlines that shortchange the process and the public process for discussion about it really is frustrating."

Dr Ludwig also suggested that the EPA's findings of potential harm to nearly all listed species from the three pesticides seemed unrealistic. "When you have everything being a problem, it doesn't ring true," Dr Ludwig said.

Environmentalists on the PPDC countered that further delays were unwarranted and suggested that their organisations, which brought the underlying lawsuit in 2011 that prompted the court order, would contest any efforts to move the existing deadlines. "I know this process is extremely complex and time consuming ... but I just think that it is late in the game for a request like this," said Sharon Selvaggio, wildlife programme director for the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP).

The industry letters do little more than echo concerns raised during comment periods and multiple public meetings, added Lori Ann Burd, the Center for Biological Diversity's environmental health director. "This has been the most transparent consultation process in history with these long comment periods and many opportunities for stakeholder input," she said. "And it is incredibly frustrating to see this agency considering an 11th hour attempt to thwart nearly half a decade of progress on this." Ms Burd added that her organisation "strongly encourages" the administration not to grant the industry request.

COMPANIES / BUSINESS

Isagro Q1 agchem sales down 10%

BY ROBERT BIRKETT

Italian agrochemical company Isagro (Milan) posted a 10% fall in agrochemical sales to some €45 million ($49.2 million at the current rate) in the first quarter of 2017.

The drop in sales came solely from proprietary pesticide product sales rather than from business through third parties or other services. Business from those segments was flat.

Proprietary sales of agrochemical products lost some 11% at €40 million, while third-party sales remained at some €5 million. Total sales, including non-agrochemicals, fell by 8.9% €47.2 million. The company stresses that the first three months are historically unrepresentative of its business.

The company reports unfavourable weather conditions in parts of the US and Europe, low commodity prices, poor weather and market conditions in India, but signs of recovery in Brazil.

Isagro also notes that last year's first three months saw an "unusual concentration" of sales, while compared with an average over the past three first quarters, the reported quarterly sales were 2.6% higher – a "more representative" comparison. The company cites a general recovery trend.

Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) were down by some 4.1% to €7.4 million on higher costs, while EBIT lost 6.1% to €5.2 million. As a percentage of sales, EBITDA increased from 14.9% to 15.7%, and EBIT from 10.7% to 11%, respectively.

Isagro's results (€ 000)

1st qtr ended March 31st	2016 ($ 000)[1]	% change	2017 ($ 000)[1]
Sales	51,861 (56,657)	-8.9	47,222 (51,589)
Agrochemicals2	50,000 (54,624)	-10.0	45,000 (49,162)
EBITDA3	7,724 (8,438)	-4.1	7,411 (8,096)
EBIT4	5,534 (6,046)	-6.1	5,199 (5,680)

[1] at the current rate; [2] rounded to nearest million; [3] earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation; [4] earnings before interest and tax.

The share of agrochemical sales coming in the major market of Europe – not including Italy – rose from 40% to 43%. The proportion of sales coming from Italy fell to 23% (from 27% in last year's first quarter), while those from the Americas were up at 13% (11%), Asia down to 17% (19%), and the rest of the world at 4% (3%).

Outlook

The full-year results will depend on "normalisation" of weather conditions, especially in the Americas, as well as results from deals with third parties on exploiting intellectual property. They will also reflect capital expenditures and costs from investments in 2016, a continued "strengthening" of the global commercial organisation and of the investment programmes in new products and active ingredients.

Isagro reiterates its medium-term target of €200 million annual sales by 2021. The company highlights that it is trading at a significant discount to its competitors and its market capitalisation is below its book value.

MARKETS / REGULATORY

Australian industry group slams regulator

BY ANDY BEER

The Australian industry association, CropLife Australia, has slammed the latest agrochemical registration performance figures from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) as the worst in the Authority's history. The regulator completed only 30% of registrations within statutory timeframes in the three months to March 31st 2017, compared with 82% in the quarter ending September 30th 2016. "Urgent action is now well overdue to save the regulator from getting to the point of not being able to register agricultural chemical products in timeframe at all," says CropLife Australia's chief executive officer, Matthew Cossey.

The latest quarterly report from the APVMA shows that it started work on 286 pesticide registrations and finalised 184. Some 30% were completed within the statutory timeframe, compared with 50% in the prior three-month period. A total of 627 applications were in progress, with 70% being still within timeframe. Including veterinary medicines, the total number of applications in progress amounted to 992, with 73% within timeframe.

CropLife Australia is concerned that the loss of key specialist staff from the APVMA due to its planned relocation from Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, to Armidale, New South Wales threatens to damage the agricultural sector. "This relocation is crippling the plant science industry in Australia but the real victims will be Australia's hard-working farmers," Mr Cossey says. A one-year delay in the approval of a new agrochemical is expected to cost arable farmers between Aus$64 million (US$48 million) and Aus$193 million (US$145 million). "This means that the delays the industry is now facing as a result of failing APVMA operation could result in billions of dollars of lost revenue to the Australian farming sector over the coming years," CropLife Australia's CEO points out.

Despite opposing the planned relocation, the industry association says that it has sought to work constructively with the government but the latest performance report "is making this very difficult", Mr Cossey says. "As far back as June last year, CropLife provided a comprehensive and constructive suite of measures around the development of a digital strategy, streamlined business procedures and improved regulatory outcomes to deliver a next-generation regulator," the CEO says. The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' "promised and long-overdue regulatory fixes are now three years behind schedule and these changes are about fixing the Department's last mistakes and aren't specific to addressing the disaster we are facing now", Mr Cossey says.

"The relocation of the APVMA was an arbitrary government decision that had no endorsement or support by anyone in the agriculture industry. With the regulator about to hit rock bottom, industry shouldn't be forced to bear the brunt of the consequences and serious consideration for compensating registrant losses should be given. A comprehensive package of reforms delivered immediately is necessary to avoid this being a complete failure."

MARKETS / REGULATORY

EFSA wants more info on analytical methods from agchem applicants

BY JACKIE BIRD

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has recommended that more information on analytical methods be provided in applications for EU approval of agrochemical active ingredients. The conclusions follow a meeting of EFSA experts to discuss recurring issues that have been noted during peer reviews of evaluations of ais. In addition to analytical methods, the main issues identified included the assessment of impurity profiles and the proposed specifications of ais.

To improve compliance with the latest data requirements, the EFSA advises applicants to provide analytical methods for the determination of: a relevant impurity in the formulation; and residues in body fluids and tissues. They should also provide an assessment of the analytical methods and their validation data for all old and new studies with ais and metabolites.

Interpretation of existing guidance on assessing the proposed technical specification of ais was also discussed at the meeting, but no consensus was reached. The EFSA noted a lack of harmonisation in assessments carried