

Use Import Regulations to Drive Methyl Bromide Recapture

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Existing regulations on the import of methyl bromide can be used to require recapture of the chemical rather than action on this being deferred.

Parliament's Local Government and Environment Select Committee had the opportunity to recommend a clear end to the current softly softly approach to use of this most destructive of ozone depleting chemicals. Its report was released on Friday.

While the committee recommends a number of useful steps and sets an apparent path to recapture being mandatory, its recommendation could equally lead to no requirement for use of the technology that can reduce net emissions by up to 90%. Without such Government action, the fumigation industry has financial incentives not to change practices unless local government makes recapture a requirement, something Nelson City Council is now being forced to consider applying unilaterally.

Recapture is mandatory in Tasmania and Victoria and equipment to undertake this for the container trade is available for lease now at a known cost of \$900 per month. There is no question as to its "practicality", and a method for adapting the technology to forest product exports has already been devised for trial.

The committee's recommendation that recapture be required as a condition of use only "if it proves practical and affordable" leaves open the no change option on the grounds of cost to industry, or if the timetable for action is allowed to continue to drift.

Under the Montreal Protocol, New Zealand is urged to "minimise methyl bromide use and emissions and to use non-ozone depleting technologies where possible". The chemical's use is of particular concern as each bromine molecule is up to 40 times more destructive of atmospheric ozone concentrations than a chlorine molecule (released from CFCs). Further, recapture would greatly assist in reducing exposure of humans to unsafe concentrations of the chemical. The select committee heard from MAF that the recapture technology would raise the cost of fumigation only about one third above current levels.

Existing import regulations could be used now to drive adoption of recapture technology and alternative fumigants. Instead of issuing import licenses purely on the basis of satisfactory reporting of use, Government could give notice of a date after which it would issue licenses only to those companies that either used recovery technology themselves, or else warranted that they would onsell only to those fumigators making use of it.

Exemptions could be issued if recapture proved infeasible for a particular application. This is in line with a 1995 Ministry for the Environment commitment to phase out the use of methyl bromide "as quickly as feasible".

The wait and trial approach perpetuates a transfer of risk and costs to fumigation workers and the environment that local government is then required to confront.

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