

Ombudsman asks Commission to take more steps to ensure independence of scientific experts

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The Ombudsman has asked the European Commission to take additional steps to ensure that the scientific experts advising it have no conflicts of interest. She made the suggestions after her inquiry revealed some weaknesses in the system by which the Commission verifies their independence.

The inquiry was opened after a civil society organisation raised concerns about the independence of scientific experts that contributed to an advisory report on pesticides. The Ombudsman decided to take a systemic look at how the Commission checks that experts contributing under its Scientific Advice Mechanism act independently and in the public interest.

While the inquiry showed the Commission has systems in place to assess the independence of experts, the Ombudsman found that financial interests below EUR 10 000 do not have to be declared and that not all declarations of interests are published. Ms O'Reilly has now asked the Commission to ensure scientific experts declare all relevant financial interests. The Commission should assess these financial interests and publish all declarations.