



## **Ombudsman questions priority of statistical confidentiality over transparency of environmental information**

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Following an inquiry, the Ombudsman has questioned the Commission's conclusion that the principle of statistical confidentiality prevails over the transparency of environmental information.

The Ombudsman drew attention to the matter following a complaint by a Spanish environmental organisation, which wanted access to statistics, provided by Spain, on active substances in pesticides. The Commission granted access to only parts of the four identified documents, citing protection of commercial interests and arguing that the data was covered by the principle of confidentiality set out in EU rules on statistics gathering.

The Ombudsman's inquiry showed that the redacted information related to substances intended to be released into the environment. Under EU rules on access to environmental information, there is an overriding public interest in releasing such information. In her analysis, the Ombudsman noted that the Pesticides Statistics Regulation explicitly states that it applies without prejudice to the Aarhus Regulation, governing access to environmental information.

The Commission has proposed a new regulation on agricultural sector statistics, including pesticide statistics, and has acknowledged that there is an issue with the availability of statistics on pesticides.



The Ombudsman is forwarding her decision to the European Parliament and the Council, as co-legislators, to draw attention to the conflict between the principle of statistical confidentiality and the transparency of environmental information.