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Give Bees a Chance!

A battle won, but the bees are not saved from the terrible triple P

This week is the second *European Bee Health Week*, dubbed *BeeODiversity,* and it involves a conference Wednesday 5th June in the European Parliament (EP) and a fancy exhibition outside parliament all week long. The Greens/EFA group welcome every public event, debate or policy that aims to help protect bees and biodiversity, but find it quite odd that amongst the sponsors behind the organisation of *Bees Biodiversity Network* are pesticide company *BASF* and several French grain cooperatives that belong to one of the most intensive users of pesticides in the European farming sector. The *Bees Biodiversity Network* diverts the discussions towards less controversial risk factors such as pathogens or the lack of nutritional sources. These are certainly important factors in bee health. However, we have observed that this Network's intentions are to completely neglect any consideration of the impact of agro-chemicals and the current industrial model of farming on bees health. Furthermore, the Bees Biodiversity Network represents no-one and nothing within the European or French beekeeping sectors or civil society. A bee health week sponsored by a company that sells products that are co-responsible for bee decline? That's way beyond green washing! The Greens/EFA group have therefore, with the support of some MEP's from other political groups, sent a letter, co-written by the European Beekeeping Coordination, PAN-Europe and Apis BruocSella, to the whole EP.

- Read the letter here (pdf)

Commission decides against some pesticides

Friday 24th of May was a good day for bees and bio-diversity: the decision by the European Commission (EC) to implement EU-wide restrictions on pesticide use was officially announced and published. A first small, sweet victory for all those millions of EU citizens, beekeepers, NGO´s and politicians that over the past months fought hard for the mere survival of the policy measure that the Commission announced in January. The Greens and others have always argued that the dramatic loss of bee colonies is linked to the devastating triple P: (lack of) *Pollen, Pathogens and Pesticides* (which ironically is also the acronym for *Plant Protection Products*, or pesticides). Lack of pollen is largely linked to a certain type of (monoculture) agriculture, which is in turn linked to the very same agro-chemical companies as they sell both seeds and pesticides. The Greens were and are fighting for a shift to more sustainable forms of agriculture which would be better for ecosystems and biodiversity, crucial for the production of good quality and healthy foods. But in the short term, banning pesticides is the most effective measure politicians can take. So restrictions on the use of three pesticides (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiametoxam) belonging to the neonicotinoid family will enter into force on the 1st December, because they were identified by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as being harmful to Europe’s honeybee population. This ban

targets pesticides used in the treatment of plants and cereals that are attractive to bees and pollinators but will last for only two years. And the Commission announced that it will also be reviewed, at the latest, within those two years, most likely to keep fierce legal action by Syngenta, Bayer & co at bay.

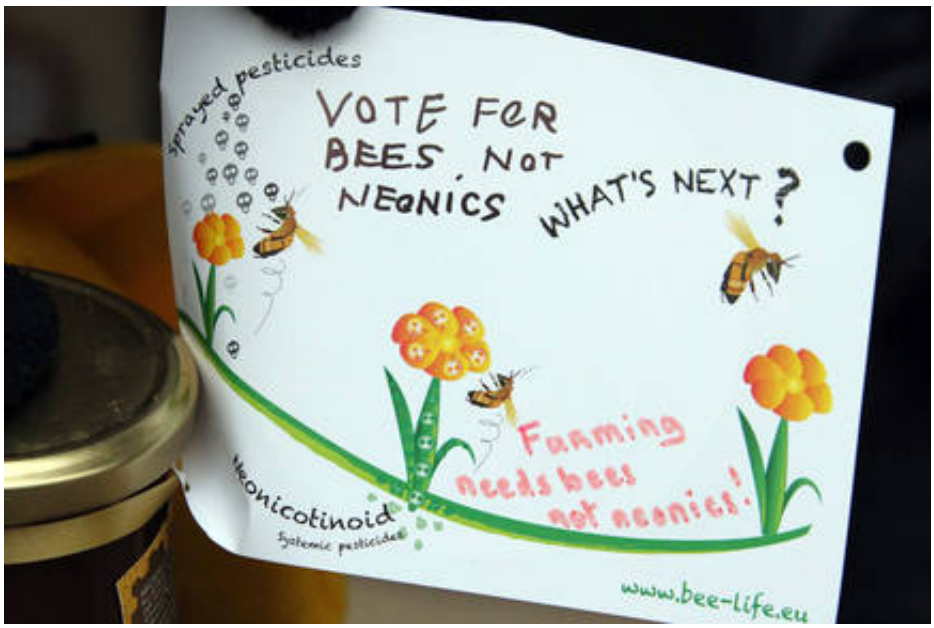


The arrogant and aggressive lobbying letters from these agro-chemical companies were revealed by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) in April. CEO had access to private letters and emails sent to the Commission and EFSA by the two above-mentioned companies and related lobby groups which displayed these companies' strong-arm tactics in trying to avoid the ban. These letters exposed these companies' lobbying strategy and even included attempts to change the wording of the original EFSA press release on scientific advice on the three neonicotinoid pesticides. As CEO wrote *'Syngenta had access to this document before its publication and immediately sent EFSA an extremely aggressive letter demanding the text be changed and issuing legal threats against the agency and its director'*. These companies made similar legal threats to the European Commission. If there is one important political aspect to these events it is that apparently, certain multinationals think it is quite normal to use intimidating tactics and language to protect their interests against the general interest. Which in turn, says a lot about their political power and morals. Although two years is a very short time span for such a ban to be implemented and fully monitored and although the ban is, for various reasons not perfect, the Greens/EFA welcome the political courage of Tonio Borg, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, and his team in defending the general interest and refusing to submit to the economic blackmail of certain big corporations. These events also show that democracy *can* be defended and that united action can succeed, when the general interest has independent science on their side. But of course neither the Greens/EFA nor beekeepers and NGO's are naïve enough to think that we've won and the bees are now safe. The Commission also announced that exceptions to the ban on use of these neonicotinoids are still allowed, but will be limited *'to the possibility to treat bee-attractive crops in greenhouses, in open-air fields only after flowering*'. One of the basic problems with this is of course that these systemic pesticides can be used after flowering of plants and also on crops not attractive to bees.

Evidence against neonicotinoids continues to grow

These neonicotinoids are extremely toxic; independent scientific studies have shown (Bonmatin, 2009) that they are a few ***thousand*** times more toxic than the legendary chemical *DDT* - and stay active in the soil

and water for a long time. The half life time of ***Imidacloprid,*** for example, is between 40 and 997 days. And it was a study by *Bayer Crop Science* itself that showed only 20% of the neonicotinoid is absorbed by the plant, and thus 80% is washed away into the environment. Yet scientists know that per hectare of corn an average of 75 gram of imidacloprid is used, while ***3.7 nanogram*** is already the lethal dose for 50 honeybees.



Put these facts next to the fact that the use of neonicotinoids has skyrocketed the past two decades....and use has tripled between 1997 and 2010, with over 1000 applications in more than 120 countries. Since 2004, for example the surface water in the Netherlands is heavily polluted with Imidacloprid, with an excess in some areas of 5 times the maximum tolerable risk standard (MTR, which is 13 nanogram per liter water). Independent scientists from the university of Utrecht concluded from intensive field research that the *'current large scale use of imidacloprid in Netherlands has major adverse effects on non-target aquatic macro invertebrates, like 70% reduction in abundance'.* They clearly state that respecting the MTR *'is only possible by a drastic reduction of the use of neonicotinoids, which means the annual use should be reduced by at least 90%'.* Given that the world production of Imidacloprid was 20,000 tonnes in 2010 (in comparison: DDT peak-use was 80,000 tonnes in 1959), this means we face a health epidemic that goes beyond bees and affects other insects and whole ecosystems as well. This is why we know the battle is not over and why the Commission ban is just a weak first step.

Two year ban does not currently cover all threats

A report published on 30th May by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) warns that although *'Europeans are living healthier and longer lives than ever before, fresh health risks are emerging, many associated with new chemicals, new products and changing lifestyle patterns'.* Some highlights of the report are that 'global sales of products in the chemicals sector doubled between 2000 and 2009, and there has been an increasing range of chemicals on the market, including pesticides, some of which affect human health, a growing concern over the effects of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and increased worries over water quality, in particular to do with pharmaceutical residues and EDCs that may not be fully removed by water treatment; The EEA and JRC clearly reinforce some of the crucial *'links between health and the environment. People are now exposed to many different harmful factors, which together are reducing both lifespans and wellbeing.* EFSA recently concluded in a report requested by the European Commission that the very toxic neonicotinoid ***Fipronil*** also poses a high acute risk to honeybees when used as a seed treatment for maize. EFSA was asked to perform a risk assessment of fipronil, paying particular regard to the acute and chronic effects on colony survival and development and the effects of sub lethal doses on bee mortality and behaviour. The Commission should do everything within its power to include Fipronil in the two year ban of the other three neonicotinoids starting on 1st

December. We will exert pressure on the Commission to take similar policy action and ban this product as well. And we will fight alongside civil society to make sure that a 'ineffective' two year ban will not be a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' in the sense that if the ban is not well implemented and not well monitored, the agrochemical lobby will say after two years "*You see, we told you it wasn't the pesticides killing bees!*" One good thing we know for sure is that independent science still exists, that it is doing its work and that over the coming months we will see an increasing number of new scientific studies showing the terrible effects of pesticides, adding to the mountain of evidence that shows that the massive use of pesticides is a dead end street...

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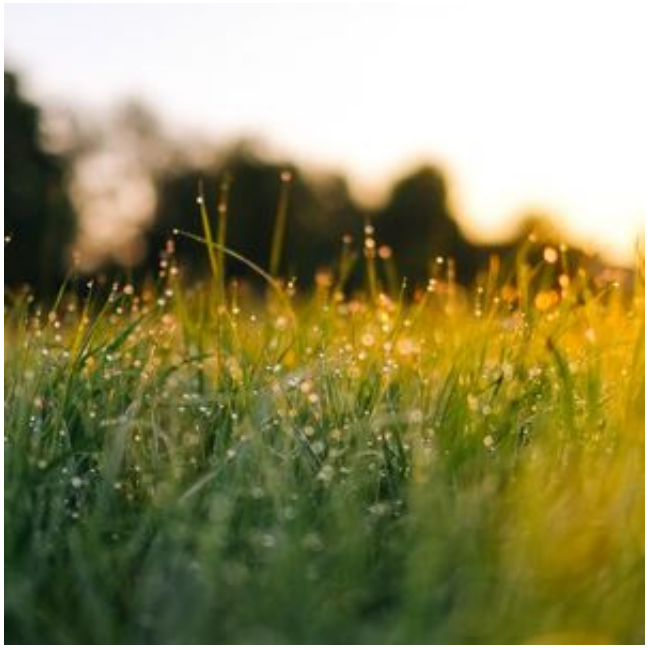
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