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Protection of bees against harmful pesticides

The European Parliament must stop Commission's plans

The European Parliament must stop Commission's plans to weaken the protection of bees against harmful pesticides

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The very partial implementation of the Bee Guidance Document is the latest of many comitology 'black box' scandals. Everybody claims they love bees, but the decision making process on how to really protect them is taking place in the dark and does not aim to protect them properly, based on existing scientific evidence.

In July 2019, member states gave the green light to the Commission (qualified majority was reached in the expert Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed/PAFF Committee/SCOPAFF) to adopt an implementing act revising the uniform principles for the assessment of pesticides. Unfortunately, this draft act is silent on the most important element with regard to the adverse effects on honeybees: it does not include anything on chronic toxicity and toxicity to bee larvae. However, this is a crucial approval criterion that was introduced in 2009 when the pesticides regulation was revised.

On Wednesday 23rd October, the European Parliament will vote on an objection to the draft act.

The objection was initiated by the Greens, with the support of the S&D, RENEW and the GUE/NGL as this proposal does not represent the latest scientific and technical knowledge, and would therefore undermine the purpose of the law to achieve a high level of protection of animal health and the environment.

CHRONIC TOXICITY VERSUS ACUTE TOXICITY

Acute toxicity describes the adverse effects of a substance that result either from a single exposure or from multiple exposures in a short period of time

Chronic toxicity is the development of adverse effects as the result of long term exposure to a toxicant or other stressor. It can manifest as direct lethality but more commonly refers to sublethal endpoints such as decreased growth, reduced reproduction, or behavioral changes.

The 2013 Bee Guidance document by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the most up-to-date scientific standard for pesticide risk assessment for bees. It includes an assessment of acute and chronic effects of pesticides on both honeybees and wild bees. This guidance enabled EFSA to provide a full evaluation of risk arising from the use of three neonicotinoid pesticides, which in turn allowed the EU to impose its much-celebrated 2018 ban on all outdoor uses of these pesticides.

COMMISSION PROPOSAL UNDERMINING THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

The lack of reference to chronic toxicity in the Commission proposal undermines the purpose of the Pesticides Regulation (1107/2009) to achieve a high level of protection of animal health and the environment. With this Regulation adopted 10 years ago, (Green rapporteur Hiltrud Breyer) the Parliament strengthened the approval criteria by requiring that active substance in pesticides shall not be approved if they have unacceptable chronic effects on honeybees. Before, as far as honeybees are concerned, pesticides were only assessed for their acute effects. But with the new generation of systemic pesticides applied via seed treatment rather than foliar spraying, chronic exposure is of particular relevance. This is why we insist that the provisions in the law with regard to chronic toxicity are fully applied.

The objection also criticizes the Commission for having caved in to the pressure by Member States: instead of going ahead with a complete implementation of the bee guidance and submit it to Council, it only put forward a mini-modification that was not controversial with Member States.

VETO FROM THE PARLIAMENT WILL SEND THE NEW COMMISSION BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

If the resolution is adopted by the EP - absolute majority required - the Commission proposal is vetoed and thus dead. The COM may then submit a new draft or a legislative proposal. The new Commission will then have the opportunity and responsibility to go back to the drawing board with a proposal in line with the law and latest scientific evidence.

GREENS/EFA DEMANDS

Any weakened text as the one now proposed by the Commission will maintain existing shortcomings in the implementation of the provisions of the EU authorisation procedure on pesticides, and thus fail to properly address the plight of Europe's bees, which are however key to the future of our biodiversity, agriculture and food security.

Given the scientific consensus, the provisions regarding chronic toxicity in the Pesticide Regulation and overall the alarming state of pollinators', Greens/EFA will object to this proposal in the plenary vote on Wednesday 23rd October.

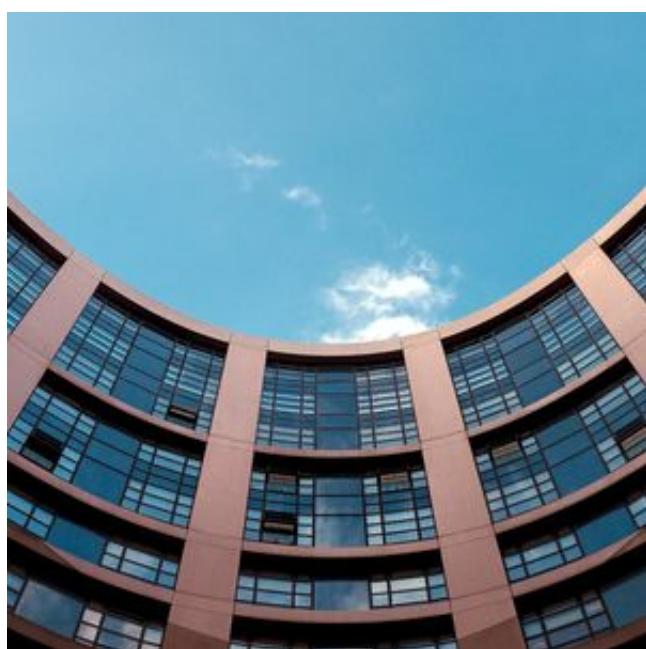
If the absolute majority of MEPs vote in favour of this objection, this will give a strong mandate to the new Commission:

- To put forward a new proposal to implement the Bee Guidance Document (BGD) as presented in July 2018 and to adopt all the sections of the EFSA BGD for which internationally validated test protocols are already available or at the final stage of validation, including chronic and larval toxicity tests;
- Once such a new proposal is adopted, not to authorize plant protection products, including for seed treatment, if they have unacceptable acute or chronic effects on colony survival and development of honeybees.

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