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Press release | 29.04.2013

Bee decline/neonicotinoid ban

Key decision for bees as European Commission pushes for proposed neonicotinoid suspension

Crucial proposals from the European Commission to suspend the use of neonicotinoid insecticides - due to their damaging impact on bee populations - were today upheld after a vote by EU member states. The outcome of the vote (1) in the Comitology Appeal Committee will enable the proposed suspension to be implemented. There was no majority for or against the proposal of the Commission, and according to the comitology procedure, the Commission can now push ahead with its partial ban by imposing it via an implementing act.

Reacting to news of the vote, Green environment and food safety spokesperson **Bart Staes** (MEP, Belgium) said:

"Today's new phase is a key step in efforts to address the decline of bee populations. The proposed neonicotinoid suspension is the only logical course of action in the face of the overwhelming and growing body of evidence on the disastrous impact of these insecticides on pollinators. Thankfully, some of the reticent EU governments responded to pressure from civil society and EU citizens by not blocking the proposals today, as had been feared following misleading lobbying from the insecticide industry (2).

"I applaud the the European Commission to defend the general interest in this case. The Commission is fully justified in its duty to follow the precautionary principle to protect the long term interests of the whole of society and the environment and not just the short term business model of the agro-chemical industry, which relies on farmer dependency and input heavy agriculture.

"The Commission's proposal to suspend the use of 3 neonicotinoids came on the back of reports from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the toxicity risk to bees of the neonicotinoid insecticides. Suspending the use of these insecticides is the only responsible course of action in response to the report, which highlighted the failures of the European and national risk assessment and monitoring systems, which enabled neonicotinoids to harm bees for a long period.

"The partial ban itself was only a compromise due to the massive and aggressive lobbying efforts of the industry, and the smoke and mirror tactics it used to mislead and misinform based on questionable science, and relying on the fact that most decision makers and the public are not. The Avaaz petition of more than 2 million signatures is reassuring because it shows that the public cannot be misled as easily as the agro-chemical-seed lobby would have liked.

"In reality, the suspension proposed by the Commission is only a first step. A complete ban of all neonicotinoids is clearly essential to prevent the collapse of our bee colonies, as only a full ban will stop the exposure of non-target insects to these persistent, systemic compounds that stay in the soil and find their way to nectar and pollen over many years. A cross-party group of MEPs has written to health commissioner Borg to this end (3)."

(1) 15 Member states voted for (187 votes, including Germany), 8 MS voted against (125 votes, including UK) and 4 MS abstained.

(2) See this Green briefing dismantling some of the claims made by the industry in their arguments against the suspension: http://www.greens-efa.eu/syngenta-lies-pesticides-9372.html

(3) A cross-party group of 90 MEPs wrote to Commissioner Borg on a Green initiative, calling for a total ban on neonicotinoids: http://www.greens-efa.eu/total-ban-on-the-use-of-neonicotinoid-insecticides-needed-9097.html

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Bart Staes

Member

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