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Press release | 26.04.2013

Bee decline

Neonicotinoid suspension must be upheld by EU governments

Crucial proposals from the European Commission to suspend the use of 3 specific neonicotinoid insecticides - due to their damaging impact on bee populations - are again set to be voted on by EU member states on Monday (29 April), after an inconclusive vote last month (1). There are concerns that key member states, like the UK and Germany, may be set to revise their position and vote to reject the proposed ban in the Council's Appeal Committee (as part of the comitology regulatory decision-making process). Ahead of this decision, Green environment and food safety spokesperson **Bart Staes** (MEP, Belgium) stated:

"Despite an overwhelming and growing body of evidence on the disastrous impact of these pesticides on pollinators, there are real concerns that EU governments could reject the Commission's proposal, following intense lobbying from industry. Instead of defending the short-term interests of the agro-chemical industry, EU governments and politicians should be prioritising solutions to the decline of bee populations: the easiest and fastest acting of these is banning these neonicotinoid insecticides.

"There are concerns that key EU member states, like the UK and Germany, could bow to pressure from the pesticide industry lobby and change their voting position and reject the proposed neonicotinoid suspensions, meaning the proposal would fall. We appeal to these governments not to heed the misleading industry lobbying (2) and to prioritise a solution to the decline of bee populations, rather than the short-sighted interests of industry.

"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 was 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.

"In reality, the suspension proposed by the Commission is only a first step. A complete ban of all neonicotinoids is 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) At the 15 March meeting of the Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH),

13 member states voted for the proposed suspensions, with 9 against and 5 abstentions. The weighted voting in council meant there was no 'qualified majority' in support of the proposals however. The Commission consequently referred the proposal to the Council's Appeal Committee. If a further vote proves inconclusive, the European Commission can push ahead with the suspensions without a final decision.

(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.htm1

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