

NEONICOTINOIDS AND BEES

Pointe to make

- The Government considers that decisions should be made on the scientific evidence. If the evidence justifies action, that action should be proportionate to the risks identified. Our current assessment is that the evidence on neonicotinoids does not support the restrictions imposed by the European Commission. We therefore opposed these restrictions along with a number of other countries.
- We were successful in getting a stay of execution so that neonicotinoids will still be available for the full range of uses this Autumn. This will reduce the supply chain disruption in adapting to the new regime. Nevertheless, we recognise that the restrictions will carry costs for growers.
- The Commission has undertaken to review the restrictions in 2015. The Government believes it is crucial that this process is well-informed. Pesticide companies will be expected to submit data in response to new EU risk assessment guidance. We are considering what additional scientific work is required and how this should be carried forward.
- Bees and other pollinators are important to farmers and to society at large. We already do much to safeguard bees through support to bee keepers, agri-environment schemes and habitat protection. We are looking actively to see what further work is needed.

Background

1. Several studies have suggested that low doses of neonicotinoids could have sub-lethal effects on bees with consequences for bee populations. Defra takes any threat to bees very seriously and has consistently made it clear that it will take proportionate action to restrict the use of these products if the evidence shows the need. We carried out our own research and prepared an assessment of the key evidence about neonicotinoids and bees. The assessment does not rule out rare effects of neonicotinoids on bees in the field. However, it suggests that effects on bees do not occur under normal circumstances.

2. Neonicotinoids are important insecticides. Their use as seed treatments allows effective control of crops at the earliest stage of crop development and they control pests that are increasingly becoming resistant to other products. Although there are uncertainties, Defra's assessment suggests that it is highly probable that restrictions on neonicotinoids carry significant costs for agriculture.

3. The European Commission have forced through a ban on the use of three neonicotinoids on a long list of crops. This comes into force from 1 December 2013 and the Commission have undertaken to review the restrictions in 2015. We are considering what work we can do to ensure that this review has a strong evidence base from which to work.

