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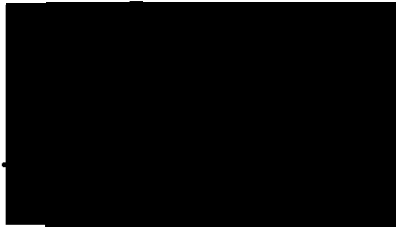
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Our ref: PO 309443/CC

Your ref: [REDACTED]

3/ June 2013

The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP
From the Secretary of State



Thank you for your letter of 25 April about neonicotinoid insecticides and bees.

You will now be aware of the outcome of the Appeal Committee on 29 April. The European Commission tabled its previous proposal for a ban on the use of three neonicotinoids on crops "attractive to bees" (a long list including oilseed rape and maize) and on spring cereals. This included a ban on the sale and use of all seeds for those crops treated with the three active substances. The ban would come into force on 1 July and would run indefinitely, although it would be reviewed after two years.

As had been the case in the discussions at SCoFCAH, there was no qualified majority for or against. Under EU rules, the Commission is now free to adopt its proposals and we expect this to happen shortly.

Recognising the importance of bees and other pollinators, the Government remains prepared to take action on neonicotinoids if the evidence indicates a need and we are, indeed, undertaking a national review of product authorisations. However, our current assessment of the evidence suggests that, while we cannot exclude rare effects of neonicotinoids on bees in the field, effects on bees do not occur under normal circumstances. Consequently, it supports the view that the risk to bee populations from neonicotinoids, as they are currently used, is low. The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Mark Walport, and Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Boyd, agree with this conclusion. More information can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-assessment-of-key-evidence-about-neonicotinoids-and-bees



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We had urged the Commission to complete a full assessment of the available scientific evidence, taking account of new field research which we had carried out. We had also called on it to make a proportionate response to the scientific assessment of risk, considering the impacts of action so that the measures taken are proportionate to the risks identified.

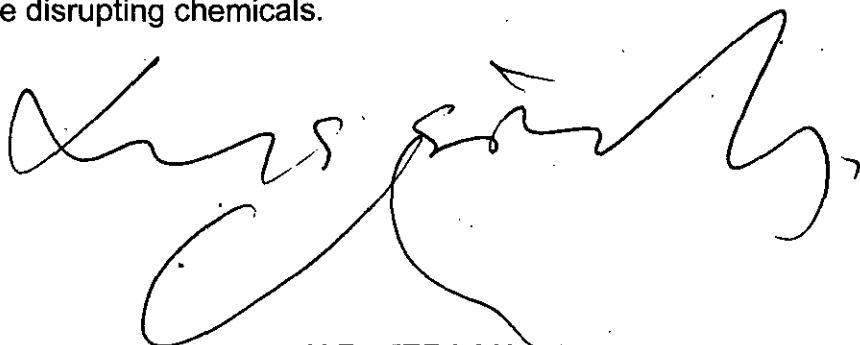
We were not able to support the proposal and voted against because, in our view, the scientific evidence does not justify it. A number of other countries agreed with us that imposing severe restrictions was not the right action to take (there were a total of eight Member States voting against and four abstentions).

Whilst disappointed with the Commission's final proposal it did, however, contain a useful concession. The date of implementation of the restrictions will now be 1 December 2013 rather than 1 July 2013. This will allow autumn sowing of treated seed and help the seed supply chain to make a relatively orderly transition to the new rules. We will do what we can to help this process, in particular by ensuring that clear information is available to growers and others affected.

The Commission also gave an assurance that it will be possible to carry out further field research on the risks to bees from neonicotinoids. This is very important. All parties acknowledge that the current evidence is incomplete. The Government will therefore lead on further work, including field studies, which will reduce the uncertainties and which will be helpful to all those with an interest in this issue. We would expect that the outcome of the Commission's review by 2015 will be founded firmly on the resultant strengthened scientific evidence base.

We will also continue with our wider work to understand and counter the various factors that can harm bees and other pollinators. Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser and I have already met to discuss this work with a number of interested parties, including some NGOs, and we will be seeking to host discussions with other stakeholders over the summer, as I know that there is a wide enthusiasm for joint work to help these crucial species. It is the very importance of pollinators to our environment and economy that underpins our determination to ensure that our approach is the right one and one based on the best possible evidence and science. We look forward to working with a broad range of people to achieve this.

You also raise other issues in pesticide regulation that may impact on the availability of pesticides for agriculture. The Government is clear that regulation is necessary to protect people and the environment. We also recognise that regulation needs to develop in step with the science and so there is a case for updating the bee risk assessment guidance. However, regulation should only impose restrictions that are justified in terms of the protection they provide. These restrictions should be proportionate and science-based. We continue to press for this approach to pesticides, particularly in developing areas such as the regulation of endocrine disrupting chemicals.



THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP



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