

To : [REDACTED]

CC :

Subject : Bees and Neonicotinoids

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 12 June to David Heath about bees and neonicotinoids. I have been asked to reply.

The European Commission drew up plans for a ban on the use of three neonicotinoids on crops “attractive to bees”, which includes 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. It was originally proposed that the ban would come into force on 1 July and would run indefinitely, although it would be reviewed after two years.

Pollinators, including bees, are essential to the health of our natural environment and to the prosperity of our farming industry. The Government attaches great importance to healthy bee populations, including managed honey bees, bumble bees and solitary bees. At a purely pragmatic level, pollination is worth several hundred million pounds per year. Bees are among our greatest allies in delivering our twin priorities of animal and plant health.

Our work to safeguard bees includes:

- The Healthy Bees Plan - working with beekeepers to provide training and respond to pest and disease threats. Within this, Defra’s National Bee Unit provides inspection, diagnostic and training services to beekeepers.
- Work under the Biodiversity 2020 banner. Objectives include a 200,000 hectare increase in priority habitats and 90% in favourable or recovering condition; much of this will benefit bees and other pollinators.
- Entry Level Stewardship - new options from 1 January 2013 include legume and herb rich swards, which will be beneficial to pollinators. Natural England actively helps farmers to select the most appropriate ELS options to benefit wildlife including guidance for ‘butterflies, bees and vulnerable grassland’.
- £2.5 million Defra funding (2010-2015) towards the £10 million Insect Pollinators Initiative. Of the nine projects being funded, two specifically focus on honey bees, and six will benefit both honey bees and bumblebees.

Recognising the importance of bees and other pollinators, the Government remains prepared to take action on neonicotinoids if the evidence indicates a need, and it is undertaking a national review of product authorisations. However, current assessment of the evidence suggests that while we cannot exclude rare effects of neonicotinoids on bees in the field, these effects do not occur under normal circumstances. Consequently the assessment 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. The evidence can be viewed at:

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

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

During March 2013 the Commission put its proposal to a vote in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health. The UK abstained in this vote and a majority of Member States either abstained or voted against the Commission. The EU rules allow the Commission to take its proposal on to an appeal committee and it did this on 29 April. Again, there was no qualified majority for or against its revised proposal and this means that the Commission is now free to adopt its proposals, which we expect it to do shortly. The UK was not able to support the proposal and voted against because, in our view, the scientific evidence didn't 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).

While disappointed with the Commission's final proposal, it did contain a 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 as 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.

Defra will also continue with its wider work to understand and counter the various factors that can harm bees and other pollinators. Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor and Lord de Mauley, the Minister responsible for this issue, have already met to discuss this work with a number of interested parties, including some Non-Governmental Organisations. Defra will be seeking to

host discussions with other stakeholders over the summer, as we know that there is a wide enthusiasm for joint work to help these crucial species.

Yours sincerely,



Customer Contact Unit
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