

SAVE THE BEES COALITION

80 EU NGOs gather to demand a full ban on neonicotinoids

In December 2013, the European Commission restricted the use of 3 highly bee-toxic neonicotinoid insecticides, namely imidacloprid, clothianidin and thiamethoxam. On the 4th anniversary of the partial ban on these substances, new scientific knowledge confirms that these restrictions do not go far enough. Therefore, more than 80 EU NGOs are gathering to ask EU decision-makers to completely ban neonicotinoids without further delay.

A proposal from the European Commission to extend the ban to all outdoor crops will be discussed on 12-13th December and Member States may be asked to vote on the proposal. The UK, Ireland and France have recently indicated that they support a tougher ban but other Member States have not made their positions known.

The Commission's proposal is based on the conclusions of the European Food Safety Authority that bees are at risk from neonicotinoid use on all outdoor crops not only from use on flowering crops that they are feeding directly on. Several new studies also show how neonicotinoids contaminate the environment and can be found in water and wildflowers putting wildlife at risk.

Martin Dermine, PAN Europe's pollinator expert said: *„In 2013, there was enough evidence to totally ban neonicotinoids. Their toxicity is not compatible with sustainable food production. Our bees and insect populations in general need special attention as their decline is dramatic. Evidence shows that, despite scaremongering information spread by the pesticide industry, the 2013 restrictions did not lead to any reduction in crop yields. There is thus no point to maintain their use and the environmental collapse they generate.“*

In 1994, when imidacloprid was first authorised on sunflowers in France, French beekeepers immediately noticed the major negative impact of these chemicals on the health of their hives. Sunflower fields shifted from being a major source of French honey production to a source of decline of French beekeeping industry. The French story expanded to the EU and the entire world along the spread of the use of neonicotinoids.

After 19 years of beekeepers and environmentalists mobilisation, the European Commission decided in 2013, to ban the use of neonicotinoids on bee-attractive crops. The EU executive also asked the producers from these substances, Bayer and Syngenta, to provide so-called ‚confirmatory data‘ in order to better evaluate the toxicity of these substances.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) assessed these confirmatory data and published its evaluations in November 2016¹. The EFSA confirmed that these substances were highly toxic to bees, bumble bees and solitary bees. The Authority also confirmed there were still data gaps impeding a proper risk assessment, in particular for wild bees. EFSA also warned that bees could be exposed to neonicotinoids outside crops as these insecticides spread rapidly in the environment, contaminating wild flowers as well.

Further, independent science have shown that the toxicity of neonicotinoids goes far beyond honey bees: bumble bees, wild bees as well as the entire world of bugs. A dramatic decline in insects was recently demonstrated (75% dropdown of insects' biomass in Germany nature areas over 27 years²) which the authors attribute to intensive farming practices, including pesticide uses. A recent update of the Worldwide Integrated Assessment on the Impact of Systemic Pesticides on Biodiversity and Ecosystems has evaluated 500 scientific evidence published since 2014 and confirm the high risk posed by these substances not only to insects but also to vertebrates and wild life in general³.

Following the November 2016 EFSA opinions, the European Commission sent in February 2017 a draft regulation to the EU member states to ban these 3 neonicotinoids from EU agriculture with an exemption being given to their use in permanent greenhouses. EU Member States will discuss and possibly vote on the draft regulation at the 12-13 Standing Committee on pesticides and member states might have the possibility to vote on the proposal.

More than 80 EU NGOs covering most of the European Union and comprising beekeepers, environmentalists and scientists are officially launching today the **Save The Bees Coalition**⁴ to obtain the ban our environment needs. The Coalition will advocate that all EU member states vote in favour of the proposal from the European Commission to ban all uses of these neonicotinoids to protect our bees, including greenhouses as evidence shows that greenhouses are not closed systems and do not prevent leakage and environmental contamination. The Coalition will also demand that all other chemical pesticides are properly tested for their impact on bees so that all bee-harming pesticides will be banned in the EU. Therefore, Member States need to approve without delay the 2013 EFSA Bee Guidance Document⁵.

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¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4606>
<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4607>

² Hallman *et al.* 2017

³ <https://www.iucn.org/news/secretariat/201709/severe-threats-biodiversity-neonicotinoid-pesticides-revealed-latest-scientific-review>

⁴ www.beecoalition.eu

⁵ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/3295>

Española de Apicultores, Asociación Galega de apicultura, Asociación Medioambiental Jara, Asociación para a Defensa Ecolóxica de Galiza, Asociación RedMontañas, Asociación Reforesta, Associació Catalana d'Afectades i Afectats de Fibromiàlgia i d'altres Síndromes de Sensibilització Central, Avaaz, Baltic Environmental Forum Latvia, Bamepe, Bee Life - European Beekeeping Coordination, Bijenstichting, Buglife, BUND, Campact, COAG - Comunitada Valenciana, Confederación en Defensa de la Abeja en la Cornisa Cantábrica, Cooperativa El Brot, Deutsche Berufs und Erwerbs Imker Bund, Division of Apiculture-Hellenic Agriculture Organisation DEMETER, Earth Thrive, Eco Hvar, ECOCITY, ecolmena, Ecological Council, Ecologistas en Acción, Estonian Green Party, European Professional Beekeepers Association, Federação Nacional dos Apicultores de Portugal, Federation of Greek Beekeepers' Associations, Foundation for the Environment and Agriculture, Friends of the Bees Foundation, Friends of the Earth Europe, Générations Futures, Gipuzkaoko Erlezain Elkarte, Glore Mill Sustainability Centre for Biodiversity and Energy, Greenpeace, Grup d'Estudi i Protecció dels Ecosistemes Catalans, Inter-Environnement Wallonie, INLUISAL SL, La Apnera, La Vinca, Lithuanian Fund for Nature, Melazahar, Melliferopolis, NABU, Natur&mwelt, Nature & Progrès Belgique, Pesticide Action Network Europe, Pesticide Action Network UK, Pestizid Aktions-Netzwerk, proBiene, Proyecto Gran Simio, Quercus, Riet Vell, Romapis, Salvem la Platja Llarga, Slovenian Beekeepers` Association, Slow Food, SOS polinizadores, Spanish Society of Organic Farming, Statera NGO, SumOfUs, Territorios Vivos, Tot mel can ginesta, Umweltinstitut München, Unió de Llauradors i Ramaders, Union Nationale de l'Apiculture Française, Via Pontica Foundation, Vilde bier i Danmark, WECF France, WECF Germany, WWF España.