

## Pesticides - Bees

### Key Messages

- **The Government takes seriously any threat to bees and other pollinators. We keep evidence on neonicotinoids under close and open-minded scrutiny. We will act if the evidence shows the need.**
- **Defra has moved fast to fill crucial knowledge gaps by carrying out new research which is being finalised and considered. In particular, we are looking at the field effects of neonicotinoids on bumble bees and at historic trends in bee health and neonicotinoid usage.**
- **The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has been mandated to review the current risk assessments for three neonicotinoids. EFSA's reports conclude more data is needed to update the current risk assessments on the use of neonicotinoids, but do not as media reports suggest, say that there are unacceptable risks to bees.**
- **The Commission has drafted a proposal to restrict the use of neonicotinoids and may seek agreement to this in mid-March. We are pressing the Commission to await the results of our field trials and to consider all the evidence fully before making a decision.**

### Background

Pesticides, such as the neonicotinoid insecticides, can only be sold or used if approved. Approval is only granted if assessment of scientific data shows that risks are acceptably low. Risks to honey bees are specifically considered. Approvals are regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to meet current standards. Earlier review is possible if concerns arise and can lead to withdrawal of product authorisations.

Academic studies have found potentially serious effects on bees in artificial conditions. However, the current evidence, which is mostly on honey bees, does not suggest that these effects would be found in field conditions. We commissioned our own research on field effects on bumble bees and an analysis of historic data on bee health and neonicotinoid use. These pieces of work were considered by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides on 29 January. Further statistical analysis of the results is needed and will be taken forward urgently. We're also examining the environmental and agronomic consequences of possible restrictions on neonicotinoids.

EFSA have reviewed the assessments for the main three neonicotinoid active substances. The Commission action comes on the back of EFSA's assessment that more data is needed to update the current risk assessments of the impacts of neonicotinoids on bees. The EU Standing Committee is due to discuss the proposed restrictions at their meeting on 14/15 March. In the mean time, we will continue to press for more information about how the action fits with the evidence (it seems to be disproportionate) and the likely economic impacts.

**Policy lead**

Name:

██████████

Tel:

██████████