

Bee-killing Neonicotinoids: European Commission proposal for a complete ban

Today, 23 March 2017, the European Commission has presented to the Member States its draft regulations to ban neonicotinoids. A vote by Member State could take place in May.

In the frame of the Comitology process, the European Commission is presenting, in the Standing Committee on Plant, Animal, Food and Feed, 3 draft regulations to ban the 3 bee-killing neonicotinoids in the entire EU. Imidacloprid, Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam would not be authorised with an exception for permanent greenhouses that are supposedly completely closed systems.

When the European Commission (EC) restricted the 3 neonicotinoids in 2013¹, the producers (Bayer for imidacloprid and clothianidin and Syngenta for thiamethoxam) were requested to provide the EC with so-called 'confirmatory data' by 31 December 2014. Based on these data, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has carried out a peer review and updated its risk assessment².

The information provided by Syngenta was not sufficient to improve the risk assessment and the majority of the risks could not be characterised: 'high risk cannot be excluded' concluded the EFSA. On the other hand, the agency identified new high risks to bees concerning Bayer's clothianidin and imidacloprid.

The draft regulations presented today will be open to comments from Member States and a first vote on the Commission's proposal could take place in May. According to the comitology rules³, the EC needs to have a positive vote from 55% of the Member States representing 65% of EU citizens (qualified majority) to implement its proposal⁴.

The high risk posed by these 3 chemicals is linked to the fact that they are the most potent and systemic insecticides ever produced by agrochemical industry. They are persistent in soils. Because they are systemic, the soil residues are absorbed by succeeding crops as well as by flowering weeds adjacent to the treated crops. They contaminate water streams and can now be found anywhere in the environment. Wild flowers' nectar is contaminated as well as rain water!

Martin Dermine, PAN Europe's pollinator project coordinator said 'Neonicotinoids have been decimating honey bees as well as wild pollinators in Europe for more than 20 years. This proposal from the Commission is a first step for the recognition of this long fight for environmentalists and beekeepers. The amount of scientific evidence on the toxicity of these insecticides is so high that there is no way these chemicals should remain on the market. This is not precaution anymore: it is prevention to avoid prolonging this environmental disaster. PAN Europe will fight with its partners to obtain the support of the Commission's proposal from a majority of Member States'

¹ Regulation 485/2013/EC

² <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/1020e>

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³ <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regcomitology/index.cfm?do=implementing.home#4>

⁴ If no qualified majority is obtained in the first vote, a second vote would take place in the 'appeal committee'. If there is still no qualified majority in favour or against the proposal in the appeal committee, the EC will be able to implement the ban.