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## EFSA shows its scientific limits by providing a low-quality assessment of national derogations for neonicotinoids

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has today published a number of reports looking at whether the granting of ‘emergency’ use derogations for neonicotinoids by some EU Member States to their farmers in 2017 was justified. The reports have been published in the run up to Bee Week, an event co-organised by EFSA aimed at designing a better future for bees and pollinators.

Following years of complaints from Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe and other stakeholders, the Directorate General for Health of the European Commission finally directed EFSA to carry out an assessment of the scientific justifications provided by Member States for granting neonicotinoids derogations in 2017. Indeed, since the 2013 restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids on bee-attractive crops, several Member States have given, year after year, derogations to their farmers to continue using these chemicals, despite their toxicity on bees.

PAN Europe has concerns about the competence of EFSA to undertake such assessments. In particular EFSA does not have the agronomic knowledge required to look at the issue in any depth and in this case the methodology they have used for the assessment is incorrect.

Whilst PAN Europe welcomes the fact that at last some kind of assessment has been undertaken, it is a shame that it is of such poor quality as to make it almost meaningless. Martin Dermine, PAN Europe Health and Environment policy officer said: *“Our analysis is that EFSA’s work has been flawed by the fact that EFSA relies on information provided by Member States. This was not a real external audit such as the ones conducted by the Health and Food Audits and Analysis (HFAA) and there is a clear conflict of interest as it is the evaluated Member States that provide the data that will permit to evaluate them”*.

Furthermore, EFSA is contradicting itself in several places; *“For the same crop/pest combination analysis for neighbouring countries, EFSA provides different assessments. For instance, for the maize/agriotes combination in Hungary, the use of semiochemicals (pheromones) is considered to be a highly effective alternative while this alternative is not mentioned for Romania. Romania could have provided an emergency authorisation for pheromones rather than neonics”*, added Dermine.

Elsewhere, EFSA considers semiochemicals or crop rotation as highly effective to fight a pest but still validates the countries’ justification for neonicotinoids. It seems that EFSA is promoting an intensive model of agriculture: *“While on the one hand, EFSA considers these products as highly toxic to bees, on the other, they give blank check to the use of derogations. In Romania, one third of the arable land is cultivated with maize or sunflower. Both crops are susceptible to *Tanymecus dilaticollis*. EFSA says crop rotation is ineffective but there is no possibility for real crop rotation with such figures. EFSA seems not to know what an effective crop rotation is! Romania needs neonics to continue this model of monocultures that destroys our pollinators.”*

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Given that Bee Week is about to begin with the involvement of EFSA, PAN Europe regrets that EFSA is damaging its image by providing this kind of assessment. These reports discredit the capacity of the Authority to properly assess derogations and PAN Europe considers that other EU bodies such as HFAA should take part in this work.

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