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From the Secretary of State

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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 18 August on behalf of a number of your constituents about neonicotinoids and bees.

Protecting our pollinators is a priority for this Government. They are an essential part of our environment and play a crucial role in food production. Our National Pollinator Strategy highlights that everyone, be they landowners, land managers, councils, or window-box gardeners, can do their bit for pollinators. The National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) is available from:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-pollinator-strategy-for-bees-and-other-pollinators-in-england

The NPS forms a framework for collective action to help manage and raise awareness of the pressures facing pollinators. To raise public awareness, a 'Call to Action', "Bees' Needs: Food and a Home" (www.wildlifetrusts.org/Bees-needs) provides five simple messages to all land owners/managers on the essential needs of pollinators and how to fulfil them.

Farmers and other land managers make a vital contribution to supporting pollinators through management and creation of beneficial habitat features. Currently, farmers can receive funding to carry out this beneficial management through the agri-environment schemes, particularly through the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package, part of the new Countryside Stewardship scheme.

Pesticide active substances are assessed at EU level and are only authorised if they meet safety requirements. The UK is responsible for authorising products containing approved active substances. For this we carry out a thorough assessment of the scientific evidence. Risks to bees are a key part of the assessment carried out before products are authorised. The regulatory regime also provides for regular reviews to take account of the latest information and scientific knowledge.

The UK has implemented the EU restrictions on neonicotinoids in full. In imposing the restrictions, the European Commission acknowledged the evidence was incomplete and promised a review of the science relating to neonicotinoids and bees. This is underway and provides an important opportunity to produce up-to-date assessments of all the scientific evidence. The UK will continue to contribute to the review as it progresses. We believe that decisions on the use of neonicotinoids should be based on a full assessment of all the available scientific information.

EU legislation sets out specific rules for authorisation in emergency situations in crop protection. This requires that authorisation can only be for "limited and controlled use" where such a measure appears necessary because of "a danger which cannot be contained by any other reasonable means". Emergency authorisations are not granted automatically and applications must be based on evidence relating to the need for the pesticide and possible harmful effects.

You may be aware that the NFU has submitted a number of applications to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE - the regulator), for emergency authorisation of neonicotinoid seed treatments on oilseed rape against insect pests for use in 2016. The Government's independent adviser, the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP), has advised that the applications do not meet the requirements for emergency authorisation. Accordingly, based on the evidence and the expert advice, the Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, George Eustice, has rejected both applications.

The advice from the ECP can be found online at:

www.gov.uk/government/groups/expert-committee-on-pesticides

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Best wishes,

Andrea Leadsom

Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs