



SUMMARY REPORT

Working Group on “Apiculture and Bee Health” Bayer Bee Care Programme

4 February 2016

European Parliament, Strasbourg

Part II

The second half of the working group meeting on “Apiculture and Bee Health” of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” entailed a presentation of the Bayer Bee Care Programme, which was followed by a discussion. It was underlined that even though the views of industry and beekeepers often differ it is important to provide a multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue.

Mariya Gabriel, MEP and Chair of the Working Group on “Apiculture and Bee Health” welcomed the representatives from Bayer and invited them to take the floor.

Coralie van Breukelen-Groeneveld, Head of the Bee Care Center highlighted that bees are pivotal to Bayer due to their agricultural importance. It was stressed that there is a lot of discussion with regards to bee declines, but it was pointed out that the development has been stable for honeybee populations. It was underlined that population dynamics of managed honeybee colonies are determined by socio-economic factors such as the number of beekeepers, apicultural practices, price of honey, and governmental support for beekeeping. It was said that in Europe the number of colonies are correlated with the number of beekeepers, stressing that beekeepers have decreased in many countries. With regards to overwintering losses in Europe it was stated that increased honeybee losses have been observed in recent years from time to time. It was however stressed that high spatial and temporal variability play a crucial role. It was also said that no correlation has been found between bee losses and agricultural intensity. Further, it was said that losses were particularly low in the last year when the full range of neonicotinoid products were still available underlining that high losses were recorded in the first year after the restrictions were put in place. Honeybee colony health is influenced by a combination of multiple stressors underlining that varroa mite is seen as the most common and major threat. It was also said that there is no consensus about relative importance and interactions between further potential factors. It was pointed out that there is a discrepancy between the scientific and societal perception of bee losses, which shows that there is a need to communicate with stakeholders and bring the scientific view to the general public. It was underlined that this is why Bee Care has been created, providing a platform to foster dialogue beyond agricultural communities and provide insights into current and future public acceptance of technologies with regards to bees. The Bayer Bee Care Concept aims to be recognised as a responsible partner for pollinator health. It stands on the foundation of contributing to pollinator science through a collaborative approach with external partners



working in three main areas: Feed a Bee, Healthy Hives, and Sustainable Agriculture. It was underlined that it is essential for Bayer to build relationships with key stakeholders and to be recognised as a competent and credible partner in addressing scientific matters.

Dr. Christian Maus, Scientific Lead at the Bee Care Center further explained the scope and areas of activities conducted within the three pillars. It was stressed that pollinator health is complex and multifactorial, which is reflected by the setup of the programme's activities. It was reiterated that all initiatives related to pollinator health are of global relevance, however for some of them focus regions can be defined. The first pillar "*Healthy Hives*" entails identifying factors affecting bee health. The example of a local monitoring project in Chile was given, which is based on a multifactorial approach. The project monitors bee health by focusing on diseases, parasites, apicultural practices and exposure to pesticides. The second pillar "*Feed a Bee*" focuses on foraging and nutrition as well as biodiversity. There is an ongoing project between Bayer and two ecology research institutes in Germany that are examining the effects of biodiversity-enhancing measures to pollinator communities through surveying activities. It was explained that the measures were implemented in 2011 and will run until 2017. The evaluation focuses on wild plants and on naturally occurring pollinators but also assesses further insect taxa. Thus far the results suggest that there are substantial differences between the upgraded and control areas, both in terms of abundances and of diversity on species level. It was also mentioned that the EU and North America are promoting initiatives that encourage planting of flowers in order to increase forage. The third pillar "*Sustainable Agriculture*" entails responsible use of plant protection products and enhancing beekeeper-farmer relations. A public-private project is ongoing in Germany where the "dropleg" technology is being evaluated as a bee-friendly pesticide spray application in flowering crops. Initially the project aimed to reduce residue levels of fungicides in honey after treatments of oilseed rape, which from the results have thus far been positive. In the later stages of the project trials have started to evaluate the option of insecticide application onto flowering crops with reduced bee exposure to follow. It was said that effect trials on insecticides began in 2015. Another ongoing project involves evaluating global crop attractiveness. It was explained that the project aims to conduct a comprehensive global survey of bee attractiveness, apicultural relevance and dependence on bee pollination for all major crops as a basis for pollinator-safe pesticide use and for bee risk assessment. Further, it was said that in 2014 Bayer commissioned a large field study on oilseed rape in Germany to investigate whether plants grown from seeds treated with clothianidin had an effect on wild bees, bumblebees, and honey bees. It was stressed that the results did not find any evidence of harmful effects from the seed treatment on the species observed.

Coralie van Breukelen- Groeneveld, Head of the Bee Care Center continued the presentation by highlighting the importance of stakeholder outreach through communication, education and dialogue. The Bee Care Centers provide educational and scientific facts through magazines, school programmes, information brochures, as well as by welcoming stakeholders. It was stressed that Bayer has established a global network based on dialogue, collaborations, and communication, which they aim to strengthen and further



develop. It was concluded by emphasising that Bayer will continue to play an active and visible role in pollinator health and remain open to constructive dialogue with all stakeholders.

Mariya Gabriel, MEP opened the floor to discussion and kicked off the dialogue by referring to the studies mentioned, asking how they are organised and how the species involved are chosen. It was also asked how it can be ensured that the samples taken are representative of the results. The importance of keeping an international dimension was reiterated asking how results compare to different continents involved as well as to the species, which may differ to specific regions. The difference between managed honey bees and wild pollinators was also raised asking if these studies have shown various results for the differing groups.

Christian Maus, Scientific Lead at the Bee Care Center stressed that the conducted research aims to find out more about pollinators and the ecological system they reside in. It was also underlined that by examining various species this can help provide a broader picture of the whole community. With regards to how this is focused geographically it was said that it depends on various factors as well as the availability of collaborators in a certain region. It was underlined that due to the many species of wild bees the studies can only provide some pieces of information. With regards to plant protection products it was explained that the focus remains on representative species where development of testing methodologies and input from regulators play an important part in the process. On the issue of managed pollinators and wild bees it was said that there are different characteristics among the groups that are examined. Further, thus far studies have not found any substantial differences in effects, but testing of wild pollinators is still at an early stage.

Pierre Testu, Réseau Biodiversité pour les Abeilles asked if the studies only examine the impacts of products produced by Bayer or if they are investigating specific molecules that may be found in other companies products. Further, it was asked if the studies focus solely on farming pesticide products or also on products used by beekeepers.

Christian Maus, Scientific Lead at the Bee Care Center highlighted that the studies do focus on Bayer's products as this is also an important part of the registration process for new products. It was underlined that new products are being developed with a specific focus on their pollinator friendliness, which is also being taken into account much earlier on in the development process as well as being a strong argument for production. With regards to products used by beekeepers it was said that the safety aspects are examined in their product development process and that the research can help Bayer to find new and alternative products in the long term.

Mariya Gabriel, MEP concluded the meeting by thanking the participants and highlighting the importance of keeping issues related to bee health and pollination at the top of the EU agenda.