



## SUMMARY REPORT

### Working Group on “*Apiculture and Bee Health*”

22 March 2016

European Parliament, Brussels

The working group on “*Apiculture and Bee Health*” gathered Parliamentarians for an exchange of views with the European Commission on the state of play of bee health and the beekeeping sector in Europe, the progress made and the challenges from the environmental, health, and agricultural perspectives.

**Mariya Gabriel, MEP and Chair of the “*Apiculture and Bee Health*” working group of the EP Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development*”** welcomed the participants by reminding that the working group aims to ensure that all topics related to bee health and pollination remain on the EU agenda. It is important to raise awareness among all stakeholders (beekeepers, farmers, policy-makers, scientists, NGOs, citizens, etc.) and to stay well-informed of the EU and its Member States’ projects on the matter. It was said that innovation must be supported in order to address new challenges for bees, which include agricultural, ecological, and economic. It was underlined that the origin of bee decline is multifactorial and although the issue of pesticides is often raised there are many other questions at stake such as diseases, farming and beekeeping practices, lack of biodiversity, and the reduction of food resources for bees. It was emphasised that bee health can be considered from three perspectives: environmental, agricultural, and sanitary, welcoming representatives of the European Commission to present the state of play and progress achieved from these three different perspectives.

**Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director General for DG ENV, European Commission** stressed that pollination is a vital regulatory ecosystem service essential for crop production and biodiversity. Reference was made to the EU Red List of Bees, which states that out of around 2000 bee species found in Europe 9% are threatened with extinction. It was said that for more than half of them there is insufficient data to assess the conservation status meaning that the actual percentage of species threatened with extinction could be between 4 and 60%. The data on population trends is scarcer and more worrying. According to the report 12% of populations are stable, 8% are decreasing and less than 1% increasing. However for 79% the trend is unknown due to lack of data. It was said that the main threat is loss of habitat due to agricultural practices also stressing that other threats include urban development, fires, and climate change. It was also pointed out that honey bees face a range of pathogens and diseases. The figures and research are less known on wild bee populations. At the global level the reference point is the newly published IPBES report, Thematic Assessment of Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production, which confirms the status and threats to pollinators. It highlights that approximately 40% of invertebrate species, mainly bees and butterflies, are threatened with extinction. It was also underlined that the



potential for pollination is also in decline studies showing that a drop in relative pollination potential with almost 5% for 2000 and 2010. This was linked to biodiversity and stressed the need to step up conservation efforts and implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. The Habitats and Birds Directives were underscored as they protect key habitats for bees. Completing the Natura 2000 Network was also mentioned as a key measure as well as ensuring its good management. It was also said that more should be done to restore and maintain the ecosystems within the network as well as outside (green infrastructure) in order to ensure ecological continuity which will benefit bees. Moreover, biodiversity integration should be further enhanced in the CAP. It was highlighted that the opportunities under the current agricultural policy must be captured mentioning the need to conserve species rich grasslands, selecting non-productive ecologic focus areas, and in particular creating flower strips, while limiting the use of pesticides on them. The importance of looking forward towards an ecosystem-based agriculture that can protect bees while also enhancing our food security was also raised. Finally, it was stressed that more resources should be allocated to fundamental bee research as there is a worrying decline of bee experts and expertise.

**Jens Schaps, Director Single CMO, economics and analysis of agricultural markets, DG AGRI** stressed the importance of promoting a sustainable and viable environment in which the bee population can grow. It was pointed out that in the past pollination has been taken for granted but due to the intensification of agriculture, changes in landscape, climate change, and diseases this has quickly come to impact bees. The EU has more than 600 000 beekeepers managing approximately 16 million beehives. The main product is honey and one element of importance is being able to maintain the quality of honey produced. It was also said that an important point of discussion are the changes that were made last year with the Parliaments delegated act in particular the support available to Member States to set up apiculture programmes. It was explained that the programmes run for three years co-financed by the EU with a total budget of 33 million available to Member States. It was said that more than 90% of the funds foreseen for this year have already been allocated and used underlining that follow-up thus far shows that implementation is sufficient. It has been shown that the main element that Member States pursue in the apiculture programmes is technical measures such as combating bee hive invaders. The Commission hopes to enlarge the scope of products commercialised and develop markets. The process moving forward will be to conduct a report in the implementation of the programmes and showcase that the uptake has been positive. With regards to the second pillar of the CAP it was said that there are many agri-environmental programs operating on the regional level which improve the condition for bees.

**Michael Flueh, Head of Unit, Pesticides and biocides DG SANCO** highlighted that many are concerned with the effects of pesticides on biodiversity stressing that under the current system no basic tools have yet been developed to assess the effects and therefore makes it difficult to measure. It was said that the Commission has taken some drastic measures mentioning the decision to restrict three pesticides belonging to the group of neonicotinoids in 2013. Further, a guidance document was developed on the risk assessment of plant



protection products on bees. It was pointed out that the document has not yet been adopted or endorsed by Member States. There are diverging views on how to assess it but the Commission will advise to adopt the document independently and recommend Member States to use the document. It was also said that quite regularly legislation allows Member States to derogate from legislation. Even though Member States underline that they are committed to protecting bees and are concerned with the decline it is also realised that more and more States are making derogations contradicting this view. It was said that Member States understand that bees need to be protected, but crops also need to be protected from pests and diseases.

**Alojz Peterle MEP** reiterated the need for strategic thinking and on using an ecosystem and habitats-based approach. It was asked how intensive farming can really change as it is difficult to move from a monoculture. It was also asked how much was invested in producing friendly pesticides stressing that the EU should do more to promote alternatives. The importance of involving the local level was also raised.

**Mairead McGuinness MEP** highlighted the issue of wild bees and the lack of information available for these populations. With regards to honey bees it was said that there is an issue with training and educating young and new beekeepers. It was also underlined that the bigger question emerging is how to take a holistic approach to agriculture, which provides us with food to prices we are prepared to pay and puts a value in terms of ecosystems and biodiversity.

**Daniel Calleja Crespo** underlined the importance of joining forces and halting degradation of biodiversity by 2020. With regards to intensive agricultural practices it was said that under the second pillar of the CAP there are many possibilities to work with farmers. Further it was said that it is necessary to acknowledge also biodiversity in urban areas by promoting green infrastructure and networks in cities that can provide important opportunities for urban bee populations. Support was also reiterated to the upcoming Bee Week.

**Jens Schaps** reiterated the importance of the local level mentioning that local specificities need to be taken into account. It was also said that coordination between farmers and beekeepers can also be improved as they both rely on bees underlining that there are many opportunities for regions to target specific needs in their national regional programmes.

**Michael Flueh** reacted to the issue of developing friendly pesticides or alternatives. It was said that if friendly pesticides were available they would be produced or used already reiterating the complexity and cost of developing pesticides. It was also said that farmers are encouraged to use less toxic substances and a two step process is applied when approving products at Member State level underlining the role of regional authorities.

**Mariya Gabriel MEP** underlined that even though the national programmes are working well it still remains an insufficient amount of money when compared to the annual added value of pollination. It was further said that beekeepers are repeatedly expressed to be at a



disadvantage compared to other financially and better insured European programmes. The importance of ensuring high quality honey was reiterated stressing that imported products must be held to the same quality criteria of EU honey producers. The issue of neonicotinoids was also raised underlining that derogation is indeed an issue and challenge asking how to better protect the bees against some of these national decisions.

**Jens Schaps** pointed out that the main issue with regards to the quality of imported honey is China. It was said that 25% of the honey consumed is imported from China, underlining that the EU is trying to develop analysis tools to better detect what the real mix of honey is. Consumers must get transparent information and assurance that the quality is up to EU standards.

**Mariya Gabriel MEP** concluded the meeting by reminding participants that the 5th edition of the Bee Week will take place 13-17 June. With regards to the topic it has been discussed that everyone knows the services that bees provide for us and the title will play on the contradiction of what services we provide for bees. It was also said that Bee Week will continue to insist on the collaborative model between apiculture and agriculture. The agenda is still being worked on and will be distributed in due time also encouraging participants to contribute with their ideas.