

Farming ministers reaffirm need for a new approach to protecting honey bees

Today agriculture ministers agreed on the need to set a **specific goal to protect honey bees** from pesticides.

Member states considered guidance provided by the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)**, outlining a new approach to assessing the impact of pesticides on honey bee populations. Specifically, the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, invited ministers to consider an approach that would set the **maximum reduction in colony size at 10% across the whole of the EU**.

Ministers agreed on the need to **increase the EU's ambitions in terms of honey bee protection** while also ensuring that the measures were feasible for member states to implement. On the whole they supported the proposed approach, with some member states calling for the maximum size to be set lower than 10%. Many also stressed the importance of taking the **latest scientific advice** into account.



Today the Council made a significant step towards setting a specific protection goal for honey bees. Honey bees are not only a vital part of our ecosystems, they also help ensure a sustainable future for agriculture by pollinating crops. We are confident that today's exchange of views between ministers will lead to the introduction of EU-wide measures to protect honey bee populations from the effects of pesticides.

Maria do Céu Antunes, Portuguese Minister for Agriculture

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), bees pollinate 71 of the 100 crop species that provide 90% of the world's food. However, bee numbers have fallen steeply over the past two decades. The use of pesticides has been identified as a potential factor in this decline.

Background

According to EU law, pesticides can only be used in farming if a comprehensive risk assessment demonstrates that such use will not harm human or animal health or cause unacceptable levels of damage to the environment. The current risk levels are based on the Guidance Document on Terrestrial Ecotoxicology, produced by the European Commission in 2002.

In March 2019, the European Commission asked the EFSA to conduct a review of its 2013 Bee Guidance Document. In the context of this review, a majority of

member states expressed their preference for an approach to risk assessment that takes into account the natural variability of honey bee colony sizes. They also emphasised that any new targets for colony size needed to be feasible to implement.

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