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News

Neonic vote tabled as EC rejects beet exemption

Neil Roberts, 12 Apr 2018

The European Commission has said it will not consider an exemption for sugar beet production from a ban on neonicotinoid insecticides after announcing a vote by member states on its proposals later this month.

Government delegates will vote in committee on 27 April on the executive's [proposal to ban all outdoor uses](#) of three, already restricted, chemicals – clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam – in response to evidence of harm to bees.

The confirmation by a Commission official came after MEPs said there had been heavy lobbying by the sugar beet industry for an exemption.

Bee conservation group Pollinis said it understood up to 12 member states could be in favour of such a derogation. The issue is understood to be one reason why a vote on the ban by governments in the Commission's standing committee on plants, animals, food and feed has been delayed. Member states are understood also to be under pressure from the agro-chemical industry.

Committee votes in [December](#) and [March](#) were postponed. At last month's meeting four members were in favour of the proposal and two against, with the rest giving no opinion.

Head of pesticides at the EC's DG SANTE, Klaus Berend, told the Parliament's environment committee on Thursday the executive had received "friendly but firm" visits from sugar beet producers and the sugar industry, but "the Commission made it clear that it will not consider a derogation for sugar beet production".

The industry says neonic use in sugar beet does not endanger pollinators or the environment and that a ban could result in an average national yield loss of 12%, with losses up to 50% in some areas.

EFSA's evaluation, which concluded that [outdoor use of the neonics could harm bees](#), did not exclude a risk to succeeding crops and pollinators of chemicals persisting in soil, said Berend.

Julia Reid of the right-wing EFDD group said an "outright ban" would cause problems for beet production.

Greens/EFA group member Bart Staes said the pesticides sector had been "conducting an enormous amount of lobbying, in particular sugar beet farmers".

Berend addressed concerns that some [member states were using widespread emergency exemptions](#) to flout the ban.

S&D's Pavel Poc said "misuse" of derogations meant in some member states the ban "never existed in fact".

Some member states had been told their application of derogations "seems to be incompatible" with the regulation, said Berend.

EFSA will report in May on whether the derogations could be justified, he said, and the Commission could then prevent members states granting the same authorisations again.

The International Confederation of European Beet Growers did not respond to a request for comment.

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Follow-up:

Sugar beet industry [position](#), ENVI committee [video](#), EC neonicotinoids [page](#)

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