

Europe's rescue plan for honeybee colonies – from an EU-wide ban on pesticide use to a long-term strategy for bee health

Friday, 27 September 2013

On 27 September the Environmental Cluster organised a policy forum on 'Europe's rescue plan for honeybee colonies - from an EU-wide ban on pesticide use to a long-term strategy for bee health'. The meeting was chaired by IES researcher Dr. **Radostina Primova** and featured two speakers from relevant policy fields: Ms. Francesca Arena, Deputy Head of Unit E3 at DG SANCO (European Commission) and Mr. Marco Contiero, EU Policy Director on Agriculture from Greenpeace's European Unit.

Ms. Francesca Arena presented the Commission's policies on bee health and the EU overarching regulatory framework that has evolved over time. The overall EU strategy to protect bees is managed by a wide inter-service coordination at the Commission, covering legislative and policy measures in a number of areas: pesticides, animal health, veterinary medicines, agriculture and research. Most of these measures have been based on scientific studies and data, in particular on the risks identified by the European Food and Safety Authority (EFSA). Although constant monitoring of regulatory measures takes place, risk management solutions have been difficult to identify, mainly as a result of gaps in scientific knowledge.

Mr. Marco Contiero from Greenpeace outlined the main causes of bee decline and raised concerns about the weaknesses of the EU ban, such as its very limited timeframe, the non-consideration of neonicotinoids' persistence in soil, their synergistic effects with other agro-chemicals (e.g. fungicides) and pesticide uptake by non-crop natural vegetation. Some of Greenpeace's major demands are: to fill remaining knowledge gaps, to make the existing ban permanent and to extend its scope to non-flowering crops, to ban a larger group of harmful pesticides, to encourage the use of non-chemical alternatives to pest management and to analyse the economic cost of the systematic use of PPPs. Mr. Contiero proposed biological control and integrated pest management as alternative solutions.

The presentations were followed by a discussion with the audience, who raised questions about the conflict of interests with regard to the independence of scientific data on this issue, the mandate of EFSA, the importance of effective implementation of pesticide regulations at local level, and the anticipated external effect of the ban on third countries such as the US, Canada and Japan.