

Procedure file

Basic information		
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Honeybee health and the challenges for the beekeeping sector		
Subject		
3.10.04 Livestock farming		
3.10.08 Animal health requirements, veterinary legislation and pharmacy		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Agriculture and Rural Development		26/01/2011
		S&D TABAJDI Csaba Sándor	
European Parliament	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Environment, Public Health and Food Safety		23/03/2011
		ECR GIRLING Julie	
	 Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG Agriculture and Rural Development	Commissioner CIOLOȘ Dacian	

Key events			
06/12/2010	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2010)0714	Summary
09/06/2011	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
06/10/2011	Vote in committee		Summary
25/10/2011	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0359/2011	
14/11/2011	Debate in Parliament		
15/11/2011	Results of vote in Parliament		
15/11/2011	Decision by Parliament	T7-0493/2011	Summary
15/11/2011	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2011/2108(INI)
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Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2010)0714	06/12/2010	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE467.076	10/06/2011	EP	
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE464.754	14/07/2011	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE469.980	31/08/2011	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0359/2011	25/10/2011	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T7-0493/2011	15/11/2011	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2012)55	05/03/2012	EC	

Honeybee health and the challenges for the beekeeping sector

PURPOSE: to clarify the key issues related to honeybee health and key actions that the Commission intends to take to address them.

BACKGROUND: in the past decade several health problems have affected the beekeeping sector in different countries worldwide. In particular, in recent years, there have been several reports of increased mortality in bees both in the EU and elsewhere. This has caused serious concern all over the world, but scientific studies have not been able to determine the exact cause or the extent of these increased mortalities.

Nevertheless, the health of bees is linked with many factors of a different nature (bacterial, viral, parasitic, etc); availability of appropriate treatments; invasive species; and environmental changes. Other factors to be considered include the use of pesticides in agriculture.

It is important to protect bee health proactively, taking into account the particularities of beekeeping, the different actors involved.

Beekeeping is a widely-developed activity in the EU, both at professional (keepers with over 150 hives) and hobby level. There are around 700,000 beekeepers in the EU out of which around 97% are non-professional. That is why the EU has established certain harmonised rules to protect and maintain the health of bees, while Member States may regulate other aspects of bee keeping and related activities.

In the spirit of the [Animal Health Strategy for the European Union](#) (2007-2013 ? "Prevention is better than cure") adopted in 2007, beekeeping organisations concerned about bee health in the EU recently called for more focus on to the issue.

In November 2008, the European Parliament also passed a [resolution on the situation in the beekeeping sector](#). This called on the Commission to carry out specific actions and to ensure that those actions were coordinated.

The Commission has already launched a number of initiatives to address the concerns of the beekeeping sector and others are planned.

CONTENT: the objective of this Communication is to clarify the key issues related to bee health and key actions that the Commission intends to take to address them:

- financial support to Member States in order, inter alia, to fight Varroa (an important bee parasite that is present and well established in the EU);
- checks on the animal health requirements for imports from third countries of live bees and bumble bees to avoid introduction into the EU of exotic bee diseases;
- assess the possible implications for the bee sector in the framework of the preparatory process for the creation of the new Animal Health Law;
- a more frequent use of guidance documents at EU and/or national level, or at the level of the sector concerned, could also be envisaged to address issues for which legislation at EU level would not be appropriate;
- start a pilot surveillance programme by the end of 2011 as regards bee mortalities;
- designate an EU Reference Laboratories (EURL) for bee health which should become operational by April 2011;
- improve knowledge and training on bee health ? the contribution of the Better Training for Safer Food programme;
- improve the availability of veterinary medicines for bees;
- authorisation of pesticides at EU level only if their use has no unacceptable effect on bee health or bees or its use leads to negligible exposure of honeybees;
- preparation of a Communication on the EU Biodiversity Strategy to achieve the EU 2020 biodiversity target, which will look at ways of preventing or mitigating the loss of biodiversity by addressing its cause. The implementation of this strategy is expected to have a

- beneficial effect on bee health;
- approval of the national programmes of the 27 Member States to improve the production and marketing of apiculture products for the period 2011-2013. The EU contribution to the financing of the programmes has increased by almost 25 percent compared to the previous period (2008-2010), from 26 M€ to 32 M€ per year;
- support research projects in bee health and the decline of both wild and domesticated pollinators, including honeybee colonies, in Europe;
- improve communication between relevant players, at EU or national, regional or local level and also across policy areas;
- strengthen the global link to international activities (for instance the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)).

This Communication should serve as a basis for further discussion with the European Parliament, the Council as well as Member State authorities and stakeholders. This should contribute to identifying possible further actions needed at EU level.

It is important to understand that such actions can only be successful if all interested stakeholders take part in a constructive and transparent manner. This is why the Commission will initiate discussions in the appropriate fora to obtain extensive feedback on its intentions, and to improve its assessment and management of the bee health situation. Non-governmental organisations and beekeeping industry platforms in particular can play a dual role both to initiate and implement many new actions.

Honeybee health and the challenges for the beekeeping sector

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Csaba Sándor TABADJI (S&D, HU) on honeybee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector, in response to a Commission communication on the subject.

The report notes that beekeeping as an economic and social activity plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of rural areas, creates jobs and provides an important ecosystem service via pollination, which contributes to the improvement of biodiversity by maintaining the genetic diversity of plants. However, a decrease in the number of bee colonies has been reported in both the EU and other parts of the world, as well as a declining trend in pollinator species, which contribute to agricultural productivity. In the agricultural sector, the health of individual bees and colonies is affected by numerous lethal and sublethal factors, many of them interconnected.

Given this context, the report puts forward the following recommendations:

(1) Research and dissemination of scientific knowledge: Members consider it important to take urgent measures to protect bee health, taking into account the specificities of beekeeping, the diversity of actors involved and the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

The Commission is invited to:

- increase the level of support for honeybee-health-related research under the next financial framework and to focus the research on (i) technological developments, (ii) disease prevention and control, (iii) defining sustainable agricultural practices, (iv) promoting non-chemical alternatives and (v) generally further encouraging Integrated Pest Management techniques and the development of veterinary medical products for current EU honeybee disease-causing agents, especially the Varroa destructor mite;
- promote the setting up of appropriate national surveillance systems in close cooperation with beekeepers' associations and to develop harmonised standards at EU level to allow comparison;
- support a European Network of 'reference hives' to monitor the effect of environmental conditions, beekeeping practices and agricultural practices on bee health;
- draw up three-year programmes based on a declaration by all Member States of the number of hives actually registered rather than on estimated figures;
- encourage a greater degree of information-sharing among Member States, laboratories, beekeepers, farmers, industry and scientists, on ecotoxicological studies affecting honeybee health so as to make possible informed, independent scientific scrutiny.

Members welcome the establishment of the EU reference laboratory for bee health and call on the Commission to set up a steering committee, together with representatives of the beekeeping sector, to assist it in establishing the annual work programme of the EU reference laboratory.

The report also calls for support for training programmes for beekeepers on disease prevention and control. The Commission is invited, in cooperation with beekeeping organisations, to submit guidelines for the veterinary treatment of hives.

(2) Veterinary products: the report recognises that the development of innovative and effective treatments against Varroa mites, which are implicated in some 10 % of annual losses, is of high importance. It calls on the Member States to provide financial support for the research, development and field-testing of new bee-health medicinal products. It highlights, in particular, the need to offer the pharmaceutical industry incentives for the development of new medicinal products designed to combat bee disease.

The Commission is invited to:

- draw up common guidelines regarding veterinary treatment in the sector in order to reduce the negative effects of diseases and pests;
- work out more flexible rules for the authorisation and availability of veterinary products for honeybees, including medicines of natural origin and others that do not have health effects on insects;
- look into the possibility of extending cover under the European Union Veterinary Fund to bee diseases when the fund is next revised.

Members welcome the Commission intention to propose a comprehensive Animal Health Law. They call on the Commission to adjust the scope and financing of European veterinary policy to take account of the specific characteristics of bees and beekeeping so that bee diseases can be combated more effectively via i) adequate availability of effective, standardised medicines in all Member States, and ii) the financing of bee health in the framework of the European veterinary policy.

(3) Effects of modern agriculture on bees: the report emphasises that the European Union has only recently, with the committed involvement of the European Parliament, adopted new, stricter rules on the authorisation of plant protection products and their sustainable use, in order to ensure that they are safe for human beings and the environment. Noting that these rules include additional, strict criteria relating to bee safety, Members call on the Commission to keep Parliament informed about the successful implementation of the new rules.

The Commission is invited to improve risk assessment methodology for pesticides in order to protect colony health and population development.

The report calls, in a spirit of dialogue between beekeepers, agricultural stakeholders and public authorities, for the setting up of a system to encourage preliminary notification of beekeepers in all Member States in advance of pesticide applications, especially aerial insecticidal treatment operations. It also calls for the setting up of a system to provide on request information about the position of hives when these operations take place.

(4) Production and food safety aspects, protection of origin: Members call on the Commission to:

- constantly monitor the animal health situation in source countries, to apply the strictest animal health requirements and to put in place an appropriate monitoring system for the propagation material coming from third countries, in order to avoid introducing exotic bee diseases/parasites such as *Aethina tumida* beetles and *Tropilaelaps* mites into the EU;
- increase transparency regarding the frequency, percentage, characteristics and, above all, the results of the security checks performed at border control posts;
- include No Action Levels (NALs) or Reference Points for Action (RPAs) or Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in honey and other apicultural products for substances that cannot be authorised for the European beekeeping sector, as well as to harmonise veterinary border controls and controls on the internal market;
- modify the annexes to Directive 2001/110/EC (Honey Directive) in order to improve the standards of EU production by establishing clear legal definitions for all apicultural products, including honey varieties;
- harmonise rules on labelling with the provisions of the Regulation on Agricultural Quality Schemes and to introduce obligatory labelling with the country of origin for imported and EU-produced apicultural products.

The report calls for action to boost consumption of European honey and apiculture products, including by promoting honeys with characteristics specific to certain varieties and geographical areas.

(5) Measures in connection with the conservation of biodiversity and the forthcoming reform of the Common Agricultural Policy: Members call on the Commission to provide significantly more financial resources, by stepping up the current support for apiculture in the CAP after 2013 and guaranteeing the continued existence and improvement of the existing support programmes (Regulation (EC) No 1221/97) for the beekeeping sector. They call on the Commission to provide a safety net or a common insurance system for apiculture in order to mitigate the impact of crisis situations on beekeepers.

The Commission is invited to:

- consider the possibility of creating a special scheme for assistance to beekeepers within the framework of the direct aid scheme, for example through bee colony payments, which will help safeguard the beekeeping sector in the EU, keep beekeepers in beekeeping, encourage young people to become beekeepers and ensure bees continue to act as pollinators;
- promote sustainable agricultural practices in the CAP, to encourage all farmers to employ simple agronomic practices in line with Directive 2009/128/EC and to strengthen agri-environmental measures specific to the beekeeping sector, in the spirit of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy.

As regards the conservation of bee biodiversity, the report urges the Commission:

- within the framework of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 (Habitats Directive), to define the conservation status of the species *Apis mellifera* and, where appropriate, to include it in the Annexes to the Directive;
- within the framework of Council Directive 92/65/EEC of 13 July 1992, to ban, at least temporarily, the import from third countries of live bees and species of the genus *Bombus* sp. in order to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases.

Honeybee health and the challenges for the beekeeping sector

The European Parliament adopted by 534 votes to 16, with 92 abstentions, a resolution on honeybee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector, in response to a Commission communication on the subject.

It should be noted that an alternative motion for a resolution, tabled by more than 40 Members, was rejected in plenary.

The resolution notes that beekeeping as an economic and social activity plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of rural areas, creates jobs and provides an important ecosystem service via pollination, which contributes to the improvement of biodiversity by maintaining the genetic diversity of plants. However, a decrease in the number of bee colonies has been reported in both the EU and other parts of the world, as well as a declining trend in pollinator species, which contribute to agricultural productivity. In the agricultural sector, the health of individual bees and colonies is affected by numerous lethal and sublethal factors, many of them interconnected.

Given this context, Parliament puts forward the following recommendations:

(1) Research and dissemination of scientific knowledge: Members consider it important to take urgent measures to protect bee health, taking into account the specificities of beekeeping, the diversity of actors involved and the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

The Commission is invited to:

- increase the level of support for honeybee-health-related research under the next financial framework and to focus the research on (i) technological developments, (ii) disease prevention and control, (iii) defining sustainable agricultural practices, (iv) promoting non-chemical alternatives and (v) generally further encouraging Integrated Pest Management techniques and the development of veterinary medical products for current EU honeybee disease-causing agents, especially the *Varroa destructor* mite;
- promote the setting up of appropriate national surveillance systems in close cooperation with beekeepers associations and to develop harmonised standards at EU level to allow comparison;
- support a European Network of reference hives to monitor the effect of environmental conditions, beekeeping practices and agricultural practices on bee health;
- draw up three-year programmes based on a declaration by all Member States of the number of hives actually registered rather than on estimated figures;
- encourage a greater degree of information-sharing among Member States, laboratories, beekeepers, farmers, industry and scientists, on ecotoxicological studies affecting honeybee health so as to make possible informed, independent scientific scrutiny.

Parliament welcomes the establishment of the EU reference laboratory for bee health and calls on the Commission to set up a steering committee, together with representatives of the beekeeping sector, to assist it in establishing the annual work programme of the EU reference laboratory.

The resolution also calls for support for training programmes for beekeepers on disease prevention and control. The Commission is invited, in cooperation with beekeeping organisations, to submit guidelines for the veterinary treatment of hives.

(2) Veterinary products: the resolution recognises that the development of innovative and effective treatments against Varroa mites, which are implicated in some 10% of annual losses, is of high importance. It calls on the Member States to provide financial support for the research, development and field-testing of new bee-health medicinal products. It highlights, in particular, the need to offer the pharmaceutical industry incentives for the development of new medicinal products designed to combat bee disease.

The Commission is invited to:

- draw up common guidelines regarding veterinary treatment in the sector in order to reduce the negative effects of diseases and pests;
- work out more flexible rules for the authorisation and availability of veterinary products for honeybees, including medicines of natural origin and others that do not have health effects on insects;
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Members welcome the Commission intention to propose a comprehensive Animal Health Law. They call on the Commission to adjust the scope and financing of European veterinary policy to take account of the specific characteristics of bees and beekeeping so that bee diseases can be combated more effectively via (i) adequate availability of effective, standardised medicines in all Member States, and (ii) the financing of bee health in the framework of the European veterinary policy.

(3) Effects of modern agriculture on bees: the resolution emphasises that the European Union has only recently, with the committed involvement of the European Parliament, adopted new, stricter rules on the authorisation of plant protection products and their sustainable use, in order to ensure that they are safe for human beings and the environment. Noting that these rules include additional, strict criteria relating to bee safety, Members call on the Commission to keep Parliament informed about the successful implementation of the new rules.

The Commission is invited to improve risk assessment methodology for pesticides in order to protect colony health and population development.

The resolution calls, in a spirit of dialogue between beekeepers, agricultural stakeholders and public authorities, for the setting up of a system to encourage preliminary notification of beekeepers in all Member States in advance of pesticide applications, especially aerial insecticidal treatment operations. It also calls for the setting up of a system to provide on request information about the position of hives when these operations take place.

(4) Production and food safety aspects, protection of origin: Members call on the Commission to:

- constantly monitor the animal health situation in source countries, to apply the strictest animal health requirements and to put in place an appropriate monitoring system for the propagation material coming from third countries, in order to avoid introducing exotic bee diseases/parasites such as *Aethina tumida* beetles and *Tropilaelaps* mites into the EU;
- increase transparency regarding the frequency, percentage, characteristics and, above all, the results of the security checks performed at border control posts;
- include No Action Levels (NALs) or Reference Points for Action (RPAs) or Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in honey and other apicultural products for substances that cannot be authorised for the European beekeeping sector, as well as to harmonise veterinary border controls and controls on the internal market since, in the case of honey, low-quality imports, adulteration and substitutes distort the market;
- modify the annexes to Directive 2001/110/EC (Honey Directive) in order to improve the standards of EU production by establishing clear legal definitions for all apicultural products, including honey varieties;
- harmonise rules on labelling with the provisions of the Regulation on Agricultural Quality Schemes and to introduce obligatory labelling with the country of origin for imported and EU-produced apicultural products.

The resolution calls for a provisional threshold limit (Reference Point for Action) of 10 ppb to be set for veterinary products authorised in the European Union, in view of the different analytical methods that are applied in the various Member States.

Members call for action to boost consumption of European honey and apiculture products, including by promoting honeys with characteristics specific to certain varieties and geographical areas.

(5) Measures in connection with the conservation of biodiversity and the forthcoming reform of the Common Agricultural Policy: Members call on the Commission to provide significantly more financial resources, by stepping up the current support for apiculture in the CAP after 2013 and guaranteeing the continued existence and improvement of the existing support programmes (Regulation (EC) No 1221/97) for the beekeeping sector. They call on the Commission to provide a safety net or a common insurance system for apiculture in order to mitigate the impact of crisis situations on beekeepers.

The Commission is invited to:

- provide significantly more financial resources, by stepping up the current support for apiculture in the CAP after 2013 and guaranteeing the continued existence and improvement of the existing support programmes (Regulation (EC) No 1221/97) for the beekeeping sector, and to encourage the development of joint projects, and on the Member States to provide technical assistance for the beekeeping sector;
- ensure that the system of co-financing is compatible with the establishment of direct aid under the first pillar of the CAP by those states that consider it necessary;
- provide a safety net or a common insurance system for apiculture in order to mitigate the impact of crisis situations on beekeepers;
- within the framework of the EU's new biodiversity strategy, make financial resources available for apiculture as a priority and/or at a higher rate in all projects and actions submitted under the CAP dealing exclusively with subspecies and eco-types of *Apis mellifera* native to each region;
- clarify, in the forthcoming reform of the CAP, the support measures and aid to be assigned to the European beekeeping sector, taking account of the environmental and social public goods that honeybee colonies provide via pollination and of the environmental service performed by beekeepers in managing their bee colonies;

- consider the possibility of creating a special scheme for assistance to beekeepers within the framework of the direct aid scheme, for example through bee colony payments, which will help safeguard the beekeeping sector in the EU, keep beekeepers in beekeeping, encourage young people to become beekeepers and ensure bees continue to act as pollinators;
- promote sustainable agricultural practices in the CAP, to encourage all farmers to employ simple agronomic practices in line with Directive 2009/128/EC and to strengthen agri-environmental measures specific to the beekeeping sector, in the spirit of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy.

As regards the conservation of bee biodiversity, the resolution urges the Commission:

- within the framework of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 (Habitats Directive), to define the conservation status of the species *Apis mellifera* and, where appropriate, to include it in the Annexes to the Directive;
- within the framework of Council Directive 92/65/EEC of 13 July 1992, to ban, at least temporarily, the import from third countries of live bees and species of the genus *Bombus* sp. in order to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases.