

Honeybee health and beekeeping

European Parliament resolution of 15 November 2011 on honeybee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector (2011/2108(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2010 on the situation in the beekeeping sector¹,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 6 December 2010 on honeybee health (COM(2010)0714),
- having regard to the Conclusions of the Council of 17 May 2011 on honeybee health,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 3 May 2011 ‘Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020’ (COM(2011)0244),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 of 22 October 2007 establishing a common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions for certain agricultural products (Single CMO Regulation)², which lays out special provisions for the apiculture sector in the European Union,
- having regard to the EFSA scientific report of 11 August 2008 and the scientific report commissioned and adopted by EFSA on 3 December 2009 on Bee Mortality and Bee Surveillance in Europe,
- having regard to the ruling of the European Court of Justice on case C-442/09³, concerning the labelling of honey containing genetically modified material,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC⁴,
- having regard to Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the ‘EU protein deficit: what solution for a long standing problem?’⁶,
- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0440.

² OJ L 299, 16.11.2007, p. 1.

³ OJ C 24, 30.1.2010, p. 28.

⁴ OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0084.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A7-0359/2011),
- A. whereas 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,
- B. whereas beekeeping and biodiversity are mutually dependent; whereas, via pollination, bee colonies provide important environmental, economic and social public goods, thus ensuring food security and maintaining biodiversity, and whereas, by managing their bee colonies, beekeepers perform an environmental service of paramount importance, as well as safeguarding a sustainable production model in rural areas; whereas ‘bee pastures’, diverse foraging grounds and certain crops (rape, sunflowers, etc.) provide bees with the rich nutrition necessary in order to maintain their immune defences and stay healthy,
- C. whereas concerns have been raised that owing to the high cost of establishing a beekeeping enterprise, there are fewer people entering the sector, resulting in a shortfall in the hives needed to pollinate vital agricultural crops,
- D. whereas a decrease in the number of bee colonies has been reported in both the EU and other parts of the world; whereas pollinator species, which contribute to agricultural productivity, are in decline; whereas, in the event of a marked intensification of this trend, farmers in the EU, as well as those in other parts of the world, may have to resort to human-assisted pollination, which would entail a twofold increase in expenditure on pollination; whereas science and veterinary practice currently provide little in the way of effective prevention or disease control against certain pests and diseases, owing to insufficient research and development of new bee-health medicines in the past decades, which is the result of the limited size of the market and the consequent low interest of big pharmaceutical companies; whereas the limited number of medicines available to fight the *Varroa destructor* mite are in many cases no longer effective,
- E. whereas the health of individual bees and colonies is affected by numerous lethal and sub-lethal factors, many of them interconnected; whereas the limited number of marketed medicines to fight the *Varroa destructor* mite are in many cases no longer sufficiently efficient, owing to the emergence of resistance; whereas the use of pesticides, changing climatic and environmental conditions, loss of plant biodiversity, land use change, mismanaged beekeeping practices and the presence of invasive species may weaken colonies’ immune systems and favour opportunistic pathologies; whereas honeybees can be exposed to plant protection products via direct and indirect pathways such as wind drifting, surface water, droplet guttation, nectar and pollen,
- F. whereas beekeepers can contribute to, and help maintain, the health and well-being of their bees, although the quality of their environment plays a large role in determining how successful they are.
- G. whereas minimal use of veterinary products and active substances is advocated, as is maintaining a healthy colony immune system, but whereas resistance problems exist; whereas active substances and medicines are not metabolised by bees, and European producers rely on clean, residue-free, high-quality honey,

H. whereas a large number of European beekeepers are amateur and not professional apiarists,

Research and dissemination of scientific knowledge

1. Calls on the Commission to increase the level of support for honeybee-health-related research under the next financial framework (FP8) and to focus the research on technological developments and disease prevention and control, particularly on the impact of environmental factors on the bee colony immune system and their interactions with pathologies, on defining sustainable agricultural practices, on promoting non-chemical alternatives (i.e. preventative agronomic practices such as crop rotation and use of biological control) and on 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, as it is the main pathogenic agent and requires a greater variety of active substances to combat it, given its great ability to develop resistance and to combat endoparasites and other opportunistic diseases;
2. Considers 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;
3. Reiterates concerns that increased mortality among honeybees and wild pollinators in Europe would, if left unchecked, have a profound negative impact on agriculture, food production and security, biodiversity, environmental sustainability and ecosystems;
4. Calls on the Commission to 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; stresses the need for uniform identification and registration of bee hives at national level, with annual revision and updating; insists that the funding for identification and registration should not come from the existing programmes for the improvement of production and marketing of honey in the European Union (Council Regulation (EC) No 1221/97¹);
5. Calls on the European Commission to support a European Network of 'reference hives' to monitor the effect of environmental conditions, beekeeping practices and agricultural practices on bee health;
6. Calls on the Commission to 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;
7. Welcomes the establishment of the EU reference laboratory for bee health, which should focus on activities not covered by existing expert networks or national laboratories, and synthesise the integrated knowledge stemming from their research;
8. Stresses the need to support diagnostic laboratories and field tests at a national level and points out that overlaps in funding should be avoided;
9. Calls on the Commission to set up a steering committee, together with representatives of the beekeeping sector, which will assist the Commission in establishing the annual work programme of the EU reference laboratory; deplores the fact that the first annual work

¹ OJ L 173, 1.7.1997, p. 1.

programme of the EU's reference laboratory was presented without prior consultation of stakeholders;

10. Calls on the Commission to continue supporting scientific research on honeybee health, building on the good examples of COST Action COLOSS and the BeeDoc and STEP initiatives, and to encourage Member States to support scientific research in this area; stresses nevertheless that relations with beekeepers and beekeeper organisations should be enhanced;
11. Calls on the Commission to rule out overlaps in the use of funds in order to increase their effectiveness in guaranteeing economic and ecological added value for both bee-keepers and farmers; calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to raise their level of funding for research;
12. Calls on the Member States to encourage and oversee the setting up of national melliferous plant phenology monitoring networks;
13. Calls on the Commission actively to 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; calls on the Commission to help this process by making available its relevant webpage in all official languages of the Member States concerned;
14. Welcomes the Commission's 'Better Training for Safer Food' initiative, but calls for the exercise to be extended beyond 2011 and the number of participants from national authorities to be increased;
15. Calls for support for training programmes for beekeepers on disease prevention and control, as well as for farmers and foresters on botanical knowledge, bee-friendly use of plant protection products, the impact of pesticides and non-chemical agronomic practices to prevent weeds; calls on the Commission, in cooperation with beekeeping organisations, to submit guidelines for the veterinary treatment of hives;
16. Calls on the authorities and representative organisations in the Member States to support the dissemination of appropriate scientific and technical knowledge about bee health among beekeepers; underlines the fact that a permanent dialogue is needed between beekeepers, farmers and the relevant authorities;
17. Stresses the need to ensure adequate training for veterinarians, as well as the possibility for beekeepers to consult veterinarians and the involvement of apiculture specialists in national veterinary authorities;

Veterinary products

18. 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; considers that there is a need to increase support for authorised veterinary treatments in order to reduce the negative effects of diseases and pests; asks the Commission to introduce common guidelines regarding veterinary treatment in the sector, stressing the need for it to be properly used; calls for guidelines to be introduced for the use of molecules and/or formulations with a base of organic acids and essential oils and other substances authorised

for biological pest control;

19. Calls on the Member States to provide financial support for the research, development and field-testing of new bee-health medicinal products, especially for SMEs, in light of the beekeeping sector's contribution to biodiversity and the public good in the form of pollination, taking into consideration the high cost of veterinary treatment currently borne by beekeepers by comparison with health costs in other livestock sectors;
20. Highlights the need to offer the pharmaceutical industry incentives for the development of new medicinal products designed to combat bee diseases;
21. Calls on the Commission to 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; welcomes the Commission's proposal on the revision of the veterinary medicinal product directive, but notes that the current limited availability of such products should not be used as a basis for the registration/marketing of antibiotics to treat other opportunistic pathologies in honeybee colonies, given their impacts on the quality of bee products and resistance;
22. Welcomes the Commission's intention to introduce maximum residue levels for the use of medicinal products through the 'cascade' procedure in order to eliminate the current legal uncertainty, which hinders the treatment of sick bees;
23. Calls for a change in the regulatory environment so that the European Medicines Agency, in a spirit of protecting intellectual rights, can ensure exclusivity for the manufacturing and marketing of novel active substances in innovative bee-health veterinary products during a certain transitional period;
24. Calls on the Commission to look into the possibility of extending cover under the European Union Veterinary Fund to bee diseases when the fund is next revised;
25. Welcomes the Commission's intention to propose a comprehensive Animal Health Law; calls 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 adequate availability of effective, standardised medicines in all Member States and financing of bee health in the framework of the European veterinary policy; calls on the Commission to ensure greater harmonisation among the Member States, focusing its efforts on combating and controlling varroasis in the EU;
26. Supports breeding programmes which concentrate on disease and pest tolerance, especially with reference to varroasis;

Effects of modern agriculture on bees

27. 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; notes that these rules include additional, strict criteria relating to bee safety; calls on the Commission to keep Parliament informed about the successful implementation of the new rules;

28. Invites the Commission to improve risk assessment methodology for pesticides in order to protect colony health and population development and to ensure appropriate access to the findings and methodology of ecotoxicological studies included in the authorisation dossiers;
29. Stresses the importance of sustainable farming and calls on the Member States to transpose and fully implement, as soon as possible, Directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides, and particularly Article 14 thereof, which highlights the fact that it will be mandatory for all farmers in the EU to apply integrated pest management as of 2014, and to pay particular attention to the use of those pesticides that may have an adverse effect on bees and colony health;
30. Calls on the Commission, on the basis of reliable and effective tests under real conditions, with harmonised protocols, to consider chronic larval and sub-lethal toxicity in the risk assessment of pesticides, as laid down in Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 on the placing on the market of plant protection products, which has been in application since 14 June 2011; calls further on the Commission to pay special attention to the use of specific pesticides that have had an adverse effect on bee and colony health under certain circumstances; calls on the Commission also to strengthen research on potential substance-pathogen and substance-substance interactions; notes that all application methods should also be considered;
31. Welcomes the fact that experts from the European Food Safety Authority are carrying out an independent assessment of the requirements placed on the industry as regards supplying data on the various pesticides;
32. 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 (e.g. mosquito controls), and a system to provide on request information about the position of hives when these operations take place; calls, further, for improved information transfer via an internet-based database between beekeepers and farmers as regards the setting up of hives in the vicinity of fields, for example;
33. Calls on the Member States to consider the advisability of making beekeeping and bee health part of agricultural training;
34. With special regard to the 2009 EFSA project entitled 'Bee Mortality and Bee Surveillance in Europe', calls on the Commission to conduct objective research on the possible negative effects of GMO crops and monocultures on honeybee health;

Production and food safety aspects, protection of origin

35. Calls on the Commission constantly to 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; calls on the Commission and Member States, in cooperation with beekeeping organisations, to increase transparency regarding the frequency, percentage, characteristics and, above all, the results of the security checks performed at border control posts;

36. 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;
37. Calls on the Commission to 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 and exert constant pressure on prices and the final quality of the product on the EU's internal market, and there must be a level playing field for products/producers from the EU and from third countries; notes that the MRLs must take into account residues from good veterinary practice;
38. Calls on the Commission to put in place or modify the annexes to Council Directive 2001/110/EC¹ (Honey Directive) in order to improve the standards of EU production by establishing clear legal definitions for all apicultural products, including honey varieties, and defining the important parameters of the quality of honey, such as proline and saccharase content, low level of HMF or humidity, and adulteration (such as the glycerine content, sugar isotope ratio (C13/C14), pollen spectrum and aroma and sugar content of honey); calls for support for research into effective methods of detecting adulteration of honey; calls on the Commission to ensure that monitoring of the natural properties of honey which applies to European products also applies to products from third countries;
39. Calls on the Commission to 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 or, in the case of mixtures of products with different origins, obligatory labelling with every country of origin;
40. In the spirit of the EU's new quality policy, calls on beekeepers, their representative organisations and commercial companies to make better use of the EU origin labelling schemes (PDO and PGI) for hive products, which could contribute to the affordability of apicultural activity, and calls on the Commission, in close cooperation with beekeeping associations, to propose quality denominations and promote the direct sale of beekeeping products on local markets;
41. 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;

Measures in connection with the conservation of biodiversity and the forthcoming reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

42. Stresses the need for consultation with beekeepers by European and national authorities during the drawing up of apiculture programmes and of related legislation, in order to ensure the effectiveness of these programmes and their timely implementation; calls 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

¹ OJ L 10, 12.1.2002, p. 47.

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; calls on the Commission to ensure that the system of co-financing is compatible with the establishment of direct aid under the first pillar of the CAP (optional implementation of the current Article 68 of the CAP) by those states that consider it necessary; stresses also the need to encourage young beekeepers to enter the sector; calls 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;

43. Urges the Commission, within the framework of the EU's new biodiversity strategy, to 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;
44. Calls on the Commission to 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;
45. Notes that, according to the Commission report of 28 May 2010, the overall number of beekeepers in the EU has risen slightly in comparison with 2004; points out that, according to the report, this increase is solely attributable to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, and that, without the beekeepers from those countries, there would have been a significant decrease in the number of beekeepers in the EU; views this as indicative of the gravity of the situation in the beekeeping sector in the EU and of the need to grant it assistance and to implement concrete measures to keep beekeepers in beekeeping;
46. Calls on the Commission 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;
47. Calls on the Commission to 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; calls on the Member States to lay down agri-environmental measures geared to apiculture in their rural development programmes and to encourage farmers to engage in agri-environmental measures supporting 'bee-friendly' grasslands on field margins and to employ an advanced level of integrated production, taking a holistic approach to farming and using biological control where possible;
48. Reaffirms that the Commission considers honeybees to be a domesticated species, and therefore a livestock sector, which facilitates better health, welfare and protection measures¹ and makes for better information on conserving wild pollinators; calls, therefore, for a bee

¹ Through initiatives such as the Animal Health Strategy for the EU (2007-2013), which helps provide a single and clear regulatory framework for animal health, improves coordination and the efficient use of resources by relevant European agencies, and emphasises the importance of maintaining and improving diagnostic capability.

health protection strategy to be established and for the beekeeping sector to be incorporated into agricultural legislation and veterinary legislation taking account of its specific character, particularly with regard to compensation for beekeepers' losses in their bee population;

49. Calls on all stakeholders in the beekeeping sector to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the current common agricultural policy and the upcoming reform thereof, which take proper account of producer organisations throughout the agricultural sector;

Conservation of bee biodiversity

50. Urges the Commission, within the framework of Council Directive 92/43/EEC¹ (Habitats Directive) to define the conservation status of the species *Apis mellifera* and, where appropriate, to include it in the Annexes to the Directive; calls on the Commission, given the urgent need to conserve the species *Apis mellifera* and the various subspecies that occur in the European Union, to look into the possibility of creating a specific programme or regulation within the Life+ financial instrument that will make it possible to establish a pan-European project to restore wild populations of this species;
51. Urges the Commission, within the framework of Council Directive 92/65/EEC², 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, particularly given that there is no shortage of genetic resources for apiculture in the European Union, bearing in mind the main subspecies from which the breeds and varieties currently used in apiculture originated;
52. Recalls that measures to promote biodiversity are also vital in the non-farm sector; notes that green spaces along roads, verges of railway lines, forest cuttings for energy transmission networks and public and private gardens cover substantial areas where rational management methods can considerably increase pollen and nectar resources for bees and pollinating insects; considers that this development should be pursued in the context of harmonious land management, which in particular maintains road safety;

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53. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

¹ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

² OJ L 268, 14.9.1992, p. 54.