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PRESS RELEASE

France Travels Back in Time by Limiting the Protection of Pollinators and Biodiversity

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French parliamentarians just approved a law proposition that endangers bees, pollinators in general and biodiversity. France had spent years spearheading the progress for the protection of nature and public health from dangerous pesticides. It was at the forefront of legislative matters protecting the balance of ecosystems in Europe. However, with the vote on October 6, 2020 [1], France has significantly reversed its progress. Parliamentarians approved a law modifying conditions for the use of plant protection products on sugarbeet crops in case of sanitary danger. Authorities will now be able to introduce derogations to allow the use of banned pesticides. **Like other countries in the EU, France is now facing once more the risks of neonicotinoids, after over twenty years of beekeepers, environmentalists and scientists denouncing and presenting evidence of its unacceptable risks.**

BeeLife emphatically deplores this decision and stands in solidarity with its French members ADA AURA, FFAP, FNOSAD, UNAF and SNA, as well as with all French beekeepers and environmentalists. Francesco Panella, president of BeeLife, declares that the situation regarding derogations in France is particularly dire. "If we are sure that a pesticide is "unacceptable" to use, how can we agree to "derogate" for its use? **The "exceptions" are only used to continue not to change. Indeed, there are always alternatives, but we must want to build them.** But a good part of the agricultural and political world does not want to change, and the result is evident. **This new stepback towards unsustainability is unacceptable!"**

The decision by the French parliament is setting a dangerous precedent that expands beyond the specific use of emergency authorisations for banned pesticides. The decision has immediately

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weakened other legislative developments aiming at protecting human and environmental health. Even more troubling, it is sending a discouraging message to other members of the European Union. **After years of serving as an example for ambitious environmental policymaking, France is now finding itself lowering the bar for itself and others.**

The high risk of releasing neonicotinoids into the environment

This decision not only has a troubling symbolic message. Once national authorities approve the use of neonicotinoids by derogations to the EU ban, pollinators and ecosystems will suffer. As researchers and the European Food Safety Authority (the agency responsible for providing independent scientific advice) have shown, neonicotinoids pose a high risk to bees, and not only honeybees [2] [3]. Furthermore, these risks are not only of a single intoxication in the immediate area where neonicotinoid-based products are used. As we have denounced for years, the ways of exposure vary. **The use of neonicotinoids contaminates not only the field, but it reaches beyond, multiplying the ways of exposure and the affected area [4].**

Additionally, evidence has already revealed the increasing dangers of neonicotinoids on non-targeted species occurring chronically throughout an extended period. Neonicotinoids persist in the environment for years after their use [5]. Hence, **the French parliament's decision will have terrible effects for years to come once emergency authorisations begin to flow.**

Dangers of unchecked derogations

The use of emergency authorisations for neonicotinoids is in itself a significant challenge for the health of bees and ensuring healthy ecosystems. However, the potential abuse of emergency authorisations heightens the risks. **As evidenced in other EU member states, the abuse of emergency authorisations for neonicotinoids is not only a possibility but a reality [6] [7].** Some countries allow derogations year after year, with insufficient documentation to justify it, leaving aside the necessary studies for alternatives. This situation is a consequence of the abuse of Article 53 of Regulation (EC) No1107/2009, which allows derogations, but only under specific and well-justified conditions, as well as the proper procedure.

What now?

France is now facing significant challenges for the future of environmental protection. The text must still be examined in the Senate and then go to 2nd reading in Parliament. Additionally, there might still be a chance for the approved law to crumble if parliamentarians appeal against it to the Constitutional Council. Considering the risks of this decision, some associations have already stated that they reserve their right to attack the law in the court of justice. **At the European level, the pressure is mounting on EU authorities to find new ways to stop the**

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abuse of emergency authorisations. It is clear that the current system is not only allowing for the misuse of Article 53 but even encouraging member states to follow this dangerous path. The underlying problem that allows for the widespread use of pesticides deemed too risky persists. **We invite European institutions to read the situation in France as a wake-up call to guarantee improved protection for pollinators, particularly by ensuring the fulfilment of EU law and deterring the abuse of legal loopholes.**

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is an NGO initially formed by professionals of the beekeeping sector from different countries of the European Union. BeeLife works for the protection of pollinators in Europe, highlighting their value for nature and people. With over 20 members (beekeeping and farming associations) from 9 different European countries, BeeLife links policy, science and field observations to promote a more sustainable future for pollinators and their role in ecosystems.

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