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Mr Bart Staes, MEP (Greens)
(+ 100 co-signing MEPs)

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European Parliament, Altiero Spinelli 05F258
60, rue Wiertz, B-1047 Bruxelles

Honourable Members, Dear Mr Staes,

Thank you for your letter of 25 February 2019 to President Juncker, Vice-President Katainen, Commissioner Vella, and myself, in which you raise concerns about the implementation of the EFSA Bee Guidance Document.

Let me first underline that the Commission pays the highest attention to the protection of bees, as they play an important role as pollinators not only in nature but also for many cultivated crops.

Active substances and plant protection products can only be placed on the market in the EU after a rigorous scientific assessment has shown that their use can be expected to be safe for human health and the environment, including their impacts on bees and insects. The strict actions the European Commission recently took to strengthen the protection of the environment, e.g. by banning all outdoor uses of three neonicotinoids due to concerns about their impacts on bees are at the forefront worldwide. We can all be proud of that.

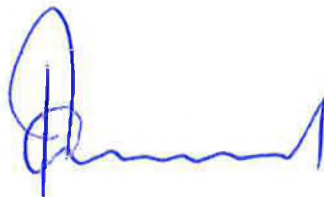
The EFSA Bee Guidance Document was adopted by EFSA in 2013 and further updated in 2014. The EFSA Bee Guidance Document has been criticised by many Member States during the discussions at the Standing Committee of Plants, Animals, Food and Feed. Attempts over the last five years to agree on the implementation of the EFSA Bee Guidance Document have failed, because many Member States do not wish to implement the Guidance before a further review, in particular for the parts related to the assessment methodology for chronic risks. The Commission is anxious to make the Guidance Notice about the implementation of the EFSA Bee Guidance Document formally applicable as soon as possible. At the same time, the Commission takes the view that guidance documents have an added value only if their content is broadly accepted by the

Member States, whose authorities are the addressees. Politically and also in view of the Member States' important role in the decision-making on active substances, the Commission prefers not to impose a document, which in practice risks being ignored or at least misapplied. Comitology is normally a collaborative process. The Commission has therefore recently proposed to make a step forward by obtaining endorsement of Member States of the parts of the Guidance Notice which are uncontested (such as the methodology related to acute risk to honeybees). In agreement with Member States, we also mandated EFSA to review its Bee Guidance Document with priority, taking into account that it is likely that new scientific evidence has become available since 2013. EFSA has also been asked to closely involve all relevant stakeholders into this process. I expect that a Guidance Notice on the implementation of the remaining parts of EFSA's reviewed Bee Guidance Document, including for chronic risk and the risk to bumble bees and solitary bees, which are the areas where most Member States wish to have a review, will then be swiftly endorsed.

I would also like to underline that the Commission is not lowering the current level of protection with regard to chronic risks to bees. On the contrary, existing data requirements on chronic risk to bees already included in Commission Regulation (EU) No 283/2013 are maintained and relevant data should be available in the application dossiers and allow assessing the potential long-term risks to bees. Furthermore, through the implementation of the parts of the EFSA Guidance related to acute risks, including assessment of different exposure routes and new requirements for higher tier testing, that part of the risk assessment will be strengthened, while there will be no change for the chronic assessment until after the review mandated to EFSA. You will agree with me that such progress, even if limited at this moment, is preferable to continuing the 5-year imbroglio on the entire Guidance Document.

Let me also emphasise that I share your concerns as regards insect and pollinator decline; indeed the situation is worrying. The causes for this decline are multifactorial and complex, and the relative importance of the factors involved are not yet established. Coordinated efforts in many areas, including on aspects of potential habitat changes for insects will be needed to stop this declining trend. That is why the Commission has initiated activities with a broader scope, such as the EU Pollinator Initiative¹.

Yours sincerely,



¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/pollinators/index_en.htm