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for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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From George Eustice MP
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Dear Chris

Thank you for your letter of 15 December to the Secretary of State on behalf of a number of your constituents about bee health and neonicotinoids. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I attended and spoke at the Westminster Hall debate on 7 December about bees and neonicotinoids in my capacity as Minister of State for Farming. I agree that the health of our pollinators is very important in itself and for the wider environment. That is why in November 2014 the Government launched a 10 year strategy which will ensure pollinator needs are addressed as an integral part of land and habitat management as well as further investigating the ways we can help pollinators thrive. This includes research on the use of pesticides.

Following concerns about some types of neonicotinoid pesticides the European Commission restricted the use of three neonicotinoids from 1 December 2013. The main European Regulation on pesticides provides for limited and controlled use of those restricted neonicotinoids on an exceptional basis in emergency situations to control a danger which cannot be contained by other reasonable means.

In the UK we use the best available science to make the decision on applications. We have a committee of scientists called the Expert Committee on Pesticides. It is the Committee's job to advise Ministers on what authorisations are capable of being issued using evidence about the impact on the environment and public safety and reflecting the relevant criteria for authorisation. When it provides its advice it has to take into account all environmental factors; such as increasing resistance to alternative pesticides due to over-reliance on them, the effect of using greater quantities of less effective pesticides on farm biodiversity, and the availability of alternative pesticides and agronomic techniques to reduce the need for pesticides.

The Committee considered two applications for emergency authorisations, each for two separate neonicotinoid seed treatments for winter oilseed rape this year. It recommended the first application, which requested authorisation to use two neonicotinoids on 79% of the national crop area, was rejected as their use was not limited and controlled. The Committee and Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser recommended that the second application, which requested authorisation to use two neonicotinoids on 5% of the national crop area, was accepted as their use was limited and controlled, was subject to stewardship arrangements, and was to control a danger which could not be contained by any other reasonable means. The minutes from the Committee's meeting are available online:

www.pesticides.gov.uk/guidance/industries/pesticides/advisory-groups/acp/acp-minutes.

Ministers followed the Committee's advice on the basis that the criteria for granting the authorisations were met.

GEORGE EUSTICE MP

