

KEITH TAYLOR
Green Party
MEP for the South East of England



Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Defra
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

27 September 2018

Dear Mr Gove,

Re: Glyphosate and its harmful effects on honey bees

I am sure you shared our distress on reading the study from University of Texas biologists ('Glyphosate perturbs the gut microbiota of honey bees'¹) published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal this month. The study reveals that glyphosate, the most widely used weed-killer in the world, is harmful to the health of honey bees, a key group of pollinators on which our food system relies.

We have long campaigned in the UK and EU to protect our wildlife, including our vital pollinators. We welcomed your assurances that you would commit the UK to ban the harmful pesticides neonicotinoids to protect our bees². The promise was a welcome departure from the UK's previous attempts to block such a ban at an EU level. We welcomed the fact that you reviewed the overwhelming evidence of harm to bees and based your commitment on that evidence, unmoved by the powerful lobbying interests that have thus far seemed to have excessive influence on government policy on pesticides.

It is with that in mind that we now ask you to urgently review the overwhelming evidence of the harm caused by glyphosate. If the unprecedented compensation payout awarded to a cancer sufferer for his exposure to glyphosate in the US³, the Monsanto Papers⁴, and the World Health Organisation's conclusion that the pesticide is 'probably carcinogenic'⁵ have not yet moved you to take action, then we sincerely hope the latest evidence of the harm caused to honey bees will.

Over 2240 tonnes of glyphosate was used on crops across in the UK in 2016⁶. We consider

¹ DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1803880115

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<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/09/uk-will-back-total-ban-on-bee-harming-pesticides-michael-gove-reveals>

³

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/aug/10/monsanto-trial-cancer-dewayne-johnson-ruling>

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<https://corporateeurope.org/food-and-agriculture/2018/03/what-monsanto-papers-tell-us-about-corporate-science>

⁵ https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/2016/glyphosate_IARC2016.php

⁶ Pesticide Usage Stats, Fera <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/pusstats/myindex.cfm>

the pervasiveness of glyphosate use in the UK to be deeply alarming considering the weight of evidence that casts doubts over its safety and the concerns about its negative impact on human and environmental health.

We noted with concern the UK government's decision to vote in favour of reauthorisation of glyphosate on the 27th of November 2017⁷. We would ask you, in the light of this new research, to revise this view and to oppose the continued use of glyphosate across the EU and follow the lead taken by Germany⁸ by urgently introducing legislation to ban the toxic weed-killer in the UK. This will be a test of your commitment to having higher environmental standards than the EU if we go ahead with Brexit.

Many farmers are already using alternative methods of weed control through integrated pest management (IPM). We urge the government to create a stronger national action plan post-Brexit that provides incentives and more support to farmers to phase out glyphosate. Alternatives to environmentally destructive pesticides that threaten our wildlife do exist and are already used by organic farmers. Since it is clear that glyphosate use is unsustainable, it is essential that all our farmers are able to learn these techniques and are prepared for farming without glyphosate.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Taylor - Green Party MEP, South East England.

Molly Scott Cato - Green Party MEP, South West England.

Jean Lambert - Green Party MEP, London.

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-42135437>

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-monsanto-cancer-lawsuit-germany/germany-aims-to-end-use-of-glyphosate-in-this-legislative-period-spokesman-idUSKBN1KY12U>