



Testimony of Environment Connecticut State Director Chris Phelps
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee

3/4/2/2016

Regarding SB 231, AN ACT CONCERNING POLLINATOR HEALTH

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, and members of the Environment Committee, my name is Chris Phelps and I am State Director for Environment Connecticut. We are a nonprofit environmental organization advocating for clean energy, clean water, and a healthy environment in Connecticut. I thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments regarding SB 231 and the issue of pollinator health.

Declining populations of bees and other pollinators is a growing concern for many of our members. In recent years, rising rates of annual loss of bee colonies has raised awareness of a significant threat to the health of pollinators on which many agricultural crops depend.

While the science shows that many factors contribute to bee die-offs, we are particularly concerned by the growing and widespread use of neonicotinoid (neonics) pesticides. Recent research suggests that this class of pesticide harms pollinators and, in particular, is contributing to declines in bee populations. In January 2016, EPA reported results of a preliminary risk assessment of the neonicotinoid imidacloprid that found it “potentially poses risk to hives when the pesticide comes in contact with certain crops that attract pollinators.”¹

Considering the vital ecological, agricultural, and economic importance of maintaining healthy pollinator populations, we believe that the existing evidence suggests that neonicotinoid pesticides should be banned at the state and federal level, and we urge the committee to adopt legislation that would move Connecticut’s policy in that direction.

Regarding SB 231, we respectfully offer these recommendations:

Section 2: We recommend expanding the list of specific applications of neonics that are prohibited beyond linden and basswood trees. There are numerous other plants that are particularly attractive to bees and other pollinators that would merit inclusion under this

¹ <http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/63E7FB0E47B1AA3685257F320050A7E3>

section. We would be happy to consult with the committee and interested stakeholders to recommend an appropriate list of such plants.

Section 4: We believe the proposed partial ban on neonic application during “blooming season” is a first step in the right direction. We suggest that, since agricultural and horticultural applications of neonics represent a significant source of pollinator exposure to these pesticides, that they should be included in this prohibition.

Section 5: We strongly believe that the composition of the proposed task force should explicitly include experts, not affiliated with the pesticide industry, with knowledge of current research regarding the threat of pesticide exposure to pollinators as well as alternative methods of land management and pest control.

Section 6: In addition to prohibiting the labelling of products treated with neonics as “bee friendly,” we recommend that inclusion of a requirement that any product treated with neonics be labeled with a pollinator health warning to alert consumers. We also suggest a more detailed and specific description of what plant products would be required to carry such warning. Such a provision would ensure that consumers who wish to choose not to purchase plants treated with neonicotinoids have the necessary information to do so. The following suggested expanded language for Section 6 is based on legislation recently introduced in Maryland²:

(a) No person shall label or advertise any seed, plant material, nursery stock, annual plant, bedding plant, or other plant that has been treated with a neonicotinoid as being beneficial to honey bees or other pollinators

(b) No person shall sell any seed, plant material, nursery stock, annual plant, bedding plant, or other plant that has been treated with a neonicotinoid unless such plant bears a label with the following statement appearing in no less than ____ pt font: WARNING: BEES AND OTHER POLLINATORS ARE ESSENTIAL TO MANY AGRICULTURAL CROPS. THIS PRODUCT HAS BEEN TREATED WITH NEONICOTINOID PESTICIDES FOUND TO CONTRIBUTE TO BEE DEATHS AND DEPLETION OF THE BEE POPULATION.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony regarding SB 231 and the importance of protecting healthy pollinator populations in Connecticut.

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² <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015RS/bills/hb/hb0605f.pdf>