



## Neonicotinoid ban based on precautionary principle, not science

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An op-ed [in the Wall St. Journal](#) by Owen Paterson, U.K. Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from 2012 until 2014 and Member Parliament (MP) since 1997, tries to bring scientific perspective to the ideological, precautionary-principle based ban on the safe and useful class of modern pesticides, neonicotinoids (“neonics”).

Paterson points out that the data seeming to incriminate neonics as a factor in the alleged decline in bee colonies was itself highly unreliable. In fact, bee colonies are thriving and were when neonics were commonly used. But several important agricultural crops are suffering serious declines due to resurgent pest infestations, thanks to the loss of neonics.

The ban was instituted at the behest of anti-science NGOs and their millions of adherents — people who had little familiarity with science or farming or farmers. Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, writes, the 2013 ban “was based on faulty science and pressure exerted by environmental lobbyists...caused a widespread deterioration in crops across the U.K. and Europe. Now that the ban is set to expire in November, the EU has a chance to correct its mistake before any more damage is done.”

“If neonics are banned, then we will have to revert back to the much more savage pyrethroid sprays, which have been proven to do so much more harm to bees—and all other insects,” says Viv Marsh, a horticulturalist working on biodiversity conservation in my North Shropshire constituency.



*What canola fields really look like without neonics: Left has not been treated, while the right has. Credit: [Gregory Sekulic](#), Canola Council of Canada Agronomy Specialist*

The anti-neonic hysteria drummed up by anti-science groups is but one example of how science, economics and simple common sense are all too often sacrificed to the mob mentality easily harnessed by so-called “environmental” groups. Merely a claim of some adverse effect on vulnerable species can be an inspiration for some activist crusade, based on nothing more than fear-mongering and the compliance of green-leaning precautionary EU regulators and bureaucrats. The campaign against neonics is another example: there are many others.

As MP Paterson concludes: “The ban is an indictment of Europe’s ‘precautionary principle’—Brussels’s trump card for implementing regulations without proof that it is necessary or beneficial. In this case, it was supposed to be an opportunity for the European Commission to examine the facts and determine whether continuing the ban after the initial two-year period was warranted. Now that the facts and the science are in, rarely has a supposed environmental hazard been so completely debunked.

“If the Commission does the right thing and allows the two-year ban to expire, it would be a huge relief to farmers trying to save their crops and conservationists trying to save the bees. Just as important, it would be a repudiation of the scare mongering employed by environmentalists and an indication that maybe, at long last, Brussels will start putting facts, science and common sense back into the process of regulatory decision making.”

I would be content with a reversal of the neonic ban. To imagine that this lesson will be emblazoned in the EU's regulatory schema and be used to counter future such unscientific, counterproductive edicts is merely wishful thinking, I fear.

“**The Bees Are Safe**—Now Lift This Pesticide Ban” demands Paterson. EU's farmers and the scientific world couldn't agree more.

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