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European Commission plans action to address decline in pollinators



One of the more fascinating opportunities to engage with nature, as we emerge from a long winter into spring, is to watch bees or other insects as they go about their work collecting nectar, and distributing pollen as they go. And if you do so this year, you will also be watching a process at the heart of a key environmental policy challenge.

Many types of crops and wild plants depend on pollinators in order to develop fruit and seeds. From apples and buckwheat to yarrow and zucchini, insect pollinators including bees, butterflies and hoverflies

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What will be in the strategy? The Commission's public consultation on it includes questions on the contribution pollinators make, the causes and consequences of their decline, how it might be halted, and, at what geographic level(s) action might be taken.

Launching the consultation, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, said: "Pollinators are too important for our food security and farming communities – as well as for life on the planet. We cannot afford to continue losing them." Indeed we can't; the annual agricultural output directly attributed to pollinators for EU-25 countries has been **estimated at €14 billion**, and €22 billion in Europe as a whole.

By 2016, the **airborne insect biomass** in protected nature areas in Germany was estimated to be less than one quarter of what it was in 1989; and across Europe almost one tenth of bee and butterfly species **face extinction**. EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, has said that "We have a good understanding of declines for some pollinators while there are knowledge gaps for others. But it is beyond doubt that it is time to act. If we do not, we and our future generations would pay a very heavy price indeed."

The consultation is open to any European organisation or citizen, with particular encouragement for scientists, farmers, businesses, environmental organisations and public authorities to respond. The Commission has already received **40 responses** to the roadmap which announced the initiative before the consultation opened.

One of the issues raised in most of the responses to the Commission's roadmap on pollinators is pesticide regulation and increasing the use of integrated pest management strategies – which aim to reduce the use of biocides by encouraging alternative pest management, and better targeted use of pesticides. An important step here will be the publication of the European Food Safety Authority's impact assessment of neonicotinoids; followed by the decision by a Member States committee on whether to support the Commission's proposal of a permanent ban on three of the pesticides on open field crops. This will send some important signals about Member State willingness to pursue hard action to tackle the decline in pollinator numbers.

More broadly, so will the development of policy on agriculture. In many ways, while the agricultural sector depends on pollinators, pollinators themselves depend on how our agriculture operates. This is because of the amount of land under agricultural management and the fact that many of the likely causes of pollinator declines are related to agricultural practices. Pollinators are vital to many crops, so there is great potential for this sector to help solve the problems. To this end, several Member States include pollinator-oriented options within their CAP agri-environment schemes.

In response to the pollinator decline, some EU Member States have set up their own pollinator strategies and action plans and stepped up monitoring and research, and considerable efforts have been made at various geographic scales to raise public awareness.

IEEP research identified some exciting projects and measures being executed in EU Member States

The success of efforts at EU, national and local level to tackle pollinator decline is critically important. At IEEP, we look forward to being involved in further activities in the run up to the launch of the Pollinators Initiative.

In the meantime, the online questionnaire for the consultation will remain open for your responses until **5 April 2018**.

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