

27.11.2017, Damian Carrington

The UK will back a total ban on insect-harming pesticides in fields across Europe, the environment secretary, Michael Gove, has revealed.

The decision reverses the government's previous position and is justified by recent new evidence showing neonicotinoids have contaminated the whole landscape and cause damage to colonies of bees. It also follows the revelation that [75% of all flying insects have disappeared](#) in Germany and probably much further afield, a discovery Gove said had shocked him.

The evidence points in one direction – we must ban neonicotinoids
Michael Gove

Neonicotinoids are the world's most widely used insecticide but in 2013 the European Union banned their use on flowering crops, although the UK was among the nations opposing the ban. The European commission now wants a total ban on their use outside of greenhouses, with a vote expected in December, and the UK's new position makes it very likely to pass.

"The weight of evidence now shows the risks neonicotinoids pose to our environment, particularly to the bees and other pollinators which play such a key part in our £100bn food industry, is greater than previously understood," said Gove. "I believe this justifies further restrictions on their use. We cannot afford to put our pollinator populations at risk."

In an article for the Guardian, Gove said: "As is always the case, a deteriorating environment is ultimately bad economic news as well." He said pollinators boost the yield and quality of UK crops by £400m-£680m every year and said, for example, gala apple growers are now having to spend £5.7m a year to do replace the work of lost natural pollinators.

Gove said the evidence of neonicotinoids' harm to pollinators has grown stronger since 2013, including a landmark field trial published in July that showed neonicotinoids damage bee populations, not just individual insects, and a global analysis of honey revealing worldwide contamination by the insecticides.