



Joint briefing

April 2014

An effective UK National Pollinator Strategy – What next?

Working together for bees

Both the NFWI and Friends of the Earth are passionate about bees; the NFWI launched its *SOS for Honey Bees* campaign in 2009, against a backdrop of increasing honey bee colony die-offs, with 99% of WI members voting in favour of more research to help the honey bee. Friends of the Earth launched The Bee Cause campaign in 2012 calling for concerted joined up action for all bee species and on all causes of bee decline.

The campaigns have resonated with more than 100,000 members of the public, politicians across parties from Parliament to town halls, and with a growing band of businesses and community groups. In addition to the best efforts of our and other organisations, strategic action at government level remains critical if we are to tackle declining bee populations and know our role in doing so.

About the National Pollinator Strategy

The Government has recognised public, political and scientific concern for bees and other pollinators by agreeing to draw up a National Pollinator Strategy (NPS). A draft NPS is currently out for public consultation until 2 May, with the final NPS expected to be launched in July 2014.

The NPS rightly recognises the inherent value of bees for the natural environment and the production of food. However, in order to realise the ambitious vision it sets out it will need to go above and beyond existing initiatives, providing meaningful ways for all those with an interest to take action and build on existing evidence and lessons, such as those from Wales, where a national action plan is already in place. Whilst the draft NPS provides an important starting point there remains room for considerable improvement before the final version is published this summer.

The NFWI and Friends of the Earth are asking the Defra Minister with responsibility for bees, Lord de Mauley, to address the main weaknesses of the Strategy, covered in this briefing. The NPS is important because, as the Government acknowledges:

- 20 species of bee have become extinct from the UK since 1900
- The cost of replacing bees with hand pollination exceeds the total market value of the crops
- About 84% of plant reproduction and 76% of food crop production in Europe depends on pollination by bees.

At a historic June 2013 Bee Summit, hosted by Friends of the Earth, the NFWI, Waitrose and The Co-operative, Lord de Mauley stated that the Government would draw up an NPS that would meet the 7 tests set by top UK scientists - see www.foe.co.uk/bees7tests

STRENGTHS: The draft NPS is good in the following main areas:

- *A clear vision to reverse bee decline:* “Given their importance for food production and biodiversity as well as their intrinsic value to the public, we are determined to set a new direction to safeguard bees and other pollinators so that they survive and thrive.”
- *Covers all pollinators:* it recognises the importance of wild bees and other pollinators alongside managed honey bees.
- *Everyone has a role:* it acknowledges the need for the Government to lead and coordinate action complementing activity by the public, business and landowners.
- *Research and review:* It commits to more studies to understand the economic and social value of pollinators, to improving the monitoring of wild bee and other species, and to an early review of the NPS in the light of emerging evidence.

WEAKNESSES: The draft has room to improve on land use, farming and pesticides – three crucial areas to get right if the final NPS is to be credible and commensurate to the task. It also lacks the necessary capacity to ensure that its ambitions are translated into action.

Planning for bees – One of the main causes of pollinators’ decline is the loss of the habitats they need for food and for shelter – often to insensitive, poorly planned development. The plan includes measures to deliver a step change in land management yet more clarity is needed on how the planning and development of land affects the habitats bees need and on how the current planning system can better plan for pollinators. New developments must protect existing bee habitat and ensure proper new pollinator habitat is incorporated. This is absent from the draft - it should be a priority action.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) should develop best practice guidance for bees and pollinators in its *Planning Practice Guidance on Natural Environment* and ensure that Local Plans produced by local planning authorities meet the Government’s aims to deliver gains for nature.

Helping farmers to help bees – With over 70 per cent of UK land devoted to farming, what happens on farmland is pivotal to whether bees and pollinators survive and revive. Many farmers are already doing great things to provide solutions for pollinators, but the draft remains unclear on how they will be helped to do more.

The draft NPS is too reliant on existing voluntary farming measures, particularly given the historically low take up of voluntary measures and even lower adoption of pollinator-specific actions in agri-environment schemes. Making CAP reform work for nature, and laying the foundations for a pest management regime that works with, not against, the environment will be crucial if farming is to play its role and not be left behind by the rest of society.

Making CAP reform work for nature - The draft NPS is heavily reliant on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) but, with 30 per cent less land covered by new agri-environment schemes (35-40 per cent compared with 70 pc before), it is unclear how farms will raise the action for pollinators. This must be clearer in the final NPS.

The new Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) to be introduced may help maintain and create buffer strips, fallow land, hedgerows and areas for nitrogen-fixing crops, but the choice of options and the management of habitat areas created will be crucial to their value for bees. EFA management would still require specific advice and incentives to ensure the proper and wider take up of most bee-friendly options.

Integrated Pest Management – the draft NPS includes measures to promote Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to reduce the risks to bees from pesticide use. But it needs to be clearer about

what is additional to existing action and how this will be targeted to help bees. The definition of IPM in the draft NPS does not refer to reducing pesticide use, yet EU rules require that priority is given to non-chemical methods of pest control.

Without a clear ambition to minimise overdependence on pesticides the conditions for pollinators are unlikely to change. IPM can help the UK move to pesticides being used less, in smarter, targeted ways and more as a last resort, not prophylactically.

New tools for farmers - Farmers will benefit from novel approaches to help them respond to the new restriction on neonicotinoids and the rising resistance of crop pests to insecticides, but the NPS needs to be more active in developing the new tools which farmers will need to start reducing pesticide use, and making these more widely available. Independently targeted government funding will be needed in delivering this.

The draft NPS places a reliance on the pesticide industry and related groups to develop research and evidence on the impact of pesticide use. Whilst there is a need for ongoing research the emphasis must be on independent peer-reviewed science.

Promoting community partnerships - While the strong role for civil society organisations and the collaborative approach set out in the NPS is to be welcomed, relying too heavily on voluntary initiatives or on outside bodies with limited lines of accountability means that the Government could well struggle to deliver the aspirational vision and intentions set out in the NPS.

In protecting our bees, we have the opportunity to deliver a transformation in the way that our communities respond and react to their local environment, and in doing so, make them much more vibrant places. It is important that the NPS has sufficient powers and funding to provide genuine safeguards, and that grassroots organisations, such as the NFWI and Friends of the Earth, along with the wider public, are given the correct support.

How can parliamentarians help?

- Respond to Defra's consultation highlighting the concerns above.
- **Attend the NFWI / Friends of the Earth bees and NPS briefing on Tuesday 8 April from 11am-1pm at the Jubilee Room, Westminster Hall.**
- Table a parliamentary question seeking further clarity on how the weaknesses outlined in this briefing will be addressed.
- Work with local WIs and Friends of the Earth local groups to raise awareness of the NPS in communities.

About the National Federation of Women's Institutes

The National Federation of Women's Institutes is an educational, social, non-party political and non-sectarian organisation. The NFWI is the largest voluntary women's organisation in the UK with some 213,000 members in 6,500 Women's Institutes across England, Wales and the Islands.

About Friends of the Earth

For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

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