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Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Kyprianou
DG SANCO
The European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi
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Brussels

May 20th 2008

Dear Commissioner,

We have corresponded previously about the need for bee health to be an urgent priority across member states and about DEFRA cuts to its bee inspection programme. In 2005 you wrote to tell me that you recognise the crucial role bees play in the EU's ecology and its ecosystems, stressing that a number of Community measures were in place to control the spread of bee diseases.

Since then there has been dramatic rise in the number of commercial bee colonies lost, both in the UK and in other member states. DEFRA figures for England and Wales show that 1 in 5 colonies are thought to have been killed off in the last 6 months. Annual colony loss figures have doubled in the past four years, from just over 6% in 2003 to nearly 12% in 2007. In France some reports claim losses of between 50-85%. Signs of colony collapse disorder have been reported in Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. A further cause for alarm is the emergence of far worse patterns of loss in the US. One report published earlier this month stated that 36.1% of the nation's commercially managed hives were lost in 2007.

The causes behind declining numbers of bees appear to be varied - ranging from bee diseases already widespread across the EU to the weather. Some studies suggest mobile phone masts are a factor in colony collapse disorder, whilst pesticides are also reported to be responsible.

As I am sure you are aware, Albert Einstein is attributed with a quote that predicted humankind would have only 4 years of life left if the honey bee were wiped off the face of the earth. In this context it is essential that other member states do not make the same mistake as the UK and downgrade the importance of regular hive inspections. DEFRA has now reversed this policy and I am calling on the Commission to ensure that the Food and Veterinary Office stresses to all member states the importance of properly funding and carrying out hive inspections.

The Commission must press for greater EU wide co-operation to manage and control disease and other risks to bee colonies. Furthermore, I would urge the Commission to facilitate a pan-European response to the issue of bee health and viability, which focuses on the urgent need to protect this vital component of Europe's ecology.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.