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Green Party

for the South East of England

Commissioner Kyprianou
DG Health and Consumer Protection
The European Commission
B1049
Brussels
Belgium

July 18th 2005

Dear Commissioner,

It has been brought to my attention that the UK government is making some changes to its Bee Health Programme that may impact on its ability to meet the requirements of the relevant EU legislation. In particular cuts to the budget and moves to make the most common bee disease non-notifiable are cause for concern.

DEFRA has recently cut the budget for the Bee Health Programme by £250,000 (20%), the predicted outcome of which is the loss of almost half the UK's Seasonal Bee Inspectors. As I am sure you will appreciate, these Inspectors play a crucial role in identifying diseases in hives and in supporting beekeepers. Proposals to increase training for beekeepers to fill the gap left by the cuts are targeted regionally, leaving a huge vacuum in the provision.

One of the main jobs that the Bee Inspectors are engaged with is identifying European Foul Brood and notifying the authorities of suspected outbreaks to meet the requirements of EU legislation. Incidents of the disease have declined over the last five years due, undoubtedly to the work of the Bee Inspectors and the strict monitoring programme that is in place. However, DEFRA are currently looking to change the regulations concerning European Foul Brood and make it a non-notifiable disease, despite opposition from beekeepers. This may lead to a far greater risk of the disease being spread through failure to identify it and take the necessary control measures. It is also likely to result in the loss of many bee colonies as the inexperience of beekeepers may result in a failure to treat the disease early enough.

Bees are crucial, both for the production of honey and for their role in the pollination of cultivated crops, wildflowers and garden plants. I hope that the Commissioner will not stand by and allow the UK government to take steps that threaten the future of such a valuable part of our ecology and are contrary to the aims of the Commission.

As ever, I look forward to hearing your views on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.

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