

Pollinators and Neonicotinoids

Report of the Head of Business Strategy and Support

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation

That the County Farms Estate Committee advises Cabinet that:

- a) There is currently limited use of neonics on the County Farms Estate.
- b) A prohibition on new tenants using neonics would have limited benefit.
- c) Training opportunities for tenants on alternative means of pest control such as Integrated Pest Management Plans should be promoted.
- d) Tenants should be encouraged to sign up to the Devon Pollinator Pledge, which has been endorsed by the NFU.
- e) The Estate should be used to implement the positive actions set out in paragraph 4.7 of this report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The County Farms Estate Committee were asked by Cabinet to consider resolution 13 made at its meeting on 13 April 2016 in response to a report by Scrutiny Committee (PTE/16/3).
- 1.2 At the County Farms Estate Committee on 28 April 2016, it was agreed that a survey of tenants of the County Farms Estate would be undertaken to better understand the use of neonicotinoids on the Farms Estate. (PTE/16/22)
- 1.3 This report sets out the findings of the tenant's survey and a number of positive measures and initiatives for consideration.

2. Legal Implications

- 2.1 DCC as landlord are unable to alter the terms of existing Farm Business Tenancy Agreements or existing Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancy agreements, and are therefore cannot currently impose a ban on the use of neonicotinoids for these tenants, unless this was by mutual agreement between the tenant and DCC as landlord.

3. Tenants Consultation

- 3.1 The short questionnaire attached at Appendix A was developed in consultation with Devon County Council's Ecologist who in turn consulted the NFU, Friends of the Earth and FWAG.
- 3.2 71 questionnaires were sent out to all occupiers of County Farm land.

3.3 The summary results of the survey are:

36 questionnaires returned (51%), representing 4,459 acres (46%) of the Estate (The Farms Estate currently totals 9,619 acres). This represents 0.35% of the net farmable acreage in Devon (1,255,661 acres).

- 3.3.1 Those 36 tenants who responded farm a total of 5,654 acres with an additional 1,195 acres which is privately owned or rented.

In terms of impact, a voluntary or imposed ban on the use of neonics on the County Farms Estate would, on its own have little material effect. At only 9,619 acres in size (0.8% of Devon's net farmable area), the benefit would be extremely low.

- 3.3.2 Of the total 5,654 acres farmed, 4,488 acres (79%) is grassland where it is understood neonics are highly unlikely ever to be needed.

- 3.3.3 Of the total 5,654 acres farmed no oil seed rape is grown (where the likelihood of needing to use neonics and impact on pollinators is arguably highest)

- 3.3.4 Of the total 5,654 acres farmed 991 acres (17%) are used to grow maize, wheat, barley and winter forage crops where the need to use neonics may exist but where the questionnaire results indicate the majority of tenants (9 out of 14 or 64%) growing such crops are already using non-neonic means of pest control.

In terms of the maize, wheat barley and winter forage crops grown by County Farms Estate tenants responding to the survey, the total 991 acres recorded only represents 0.08 % of Devon's net farming acreage. Prohibiting the use of neonics on this area would arguably make no tangible difference in Devon.

- 3.3.5 Only 5 of 36 (14%) tenants responding to the questionnaire use neonic means of pest control.

- 3.3.6 Of the 5 tenants currently using neonics, only one said they would voluntarily cease using them. 4 of the 5 said they would not.

- 3.3.7 Of the 36 tenants who responded 21 (58%) said they would sign up to a voluntary suspension on the use of neonics but it should be noted that nearly all of those who said they would sign up to the voluntary initiative do not use neonics anyway.

- 3.3.8 Of the 36 tenants who responded 12 (33%) said they would be interested in a free training event on Pesticides and initiatives such as Integrated Pest Management Plans.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 It is evident from the feedback obtained from the tenants questionnaire that the nature of the predominant cropping and use of the Estate would suggest that a significant majority of its tenants would never need to use neonics.

- 4.2 DCC as landlord has no legal means to prevent the very low proportion of existing tenants who currently use neonics on wheat, barley, maize or winter forage crops, from doing so.
- 4.3 Whilst as landlord, DCC could impose a contractual ban on the use of neonics in all future Farm Business Tenancy's, the very limited use of neonics and the low number of new tenancies granted each year suggests that such action would result in a very small/negligible benefit.
- 4.4 Where new entrants take over a farm it is likely they will continue operating the holding under a similar cropping regime to that of the former tenant suggesting an increase in neonic use following change of tenancy is unlikely.
- 4.5 To seek to impose a ban on the use of otherwise legally available pesticides in all new FBT's is felt to be unnecessary.
- 4.6 However, there are beneficial measures that the Estate could facilitate to support pollinator numbers, diversity and habitat. Such initiatives should include:
- (i) Tenants be encouraged to sign up to the Devon Pollinators Pledge to:
 - (a) Plant bee-friendly flowers. Flowers (including on shrubs and trees) provide nectar and pollen.
 - (b) Create and protect meadows and other areas rich in wild flowers. In gardens sow an area with wildflower seed, leave it to flower and set seed before cutting.
 - (c) Leaving wild corners, dead wood, walls and grassy banks undisturbed over winter to provide shelter. Leave an area to grow wild and build a 'bug hotel' in your garden.
 - (d) Think carefully about whether to use pesticides especially where pollinators are active or nesting or where plants are in flower. Only use pesticides if absolutely necessary.
 - (e) Join up and learn more. Support one of the many conservation organisations campaigning for, and conserving, our wildlife in Devon.
 - (ii) Identify and promote and/or develop new best practice case studies demonstrating how the Estate is used to support pollinators.
 - (iii) Identify and promote training opportunities around alternative means of pest control such as Integrated Pest Management Plans
 - (iv) Promote voluntary measures such as those set out in the Campaign for the Farmed Environment
 - (v) Identify County Farms more likely to be eligible for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and discuss the merits of an application with the tenants, particularly in the two Facilitation Fund Project areas of the Avon Valley and Torridge Headwaters.
 - (vi) Identify and encourage good environmental management of County farms falling within a County Wildlife Site
 - (vii) Identify and promote the use of alternative non neonic pesticides used on maize, wheat, barley and winter forage crops.

5. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

- 5.1 The views and opinions of the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Estate Tenants Association will be presented by the two co-opted members to the committee.

- 5.2 By invitation of the Farms Committee a representative of the NFU with specialist knowledge of neonics will be address the Committee at the next meeting.
- 5.3 Committee members may be aware of the current public campaign, led nationally by Friends of the Earth, supported by a range of other organisations, relating to pollinators and neonics. On 12 April a petition relating to this campaign was presented to DCC calling on it to ban the use of neonics on its property.
- 5.4 There has been no formal consultation undertaken by DCC in relation to its approach to pollinators and neonics. However, there has been some informal discussion with a range of organisations and other local authorities to gather information to inform this Authority's consideration of the issue and its planned production of a Pollinators Action Plan.
- 5.5 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations for or against the proposal have been received.

6. Considerations

- 6.1 Sustainability issues are being considered at a national (and EU) level in relation to the impacts of neonics and the need for any further regulatory control over their use. In 2014, Defra published a National Pollinator Strategy, setting out collective approaches in support of bees and other pollinators in England.
- 6.2 The author is not aware of any financial, carbon impact, equality, legal, risk management or public health issues arising from the recommendations in this report.

7. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

- 7.1 The Author has prepared this report in accordance with the County Farms Estate Strategic Review (2010) and the requirement to take forward Cabinet recommendations (see Section 1 above).

Rob Parkhouse
Head of Business Strategy and Support Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Contact for enquiries: Dan Meek, NPS SW Ltd

Tel No: 01392 351066

Background Paper	Date	File Ref.
1. Cabinet Notice of Motion: Protection of the Bee Population http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?MID=620&RD=Agenda&DF=13%2f01%2f2016&A=0&R=0	13 January 2016	PTE/16/3
2. Pollinators and Neonicotinoids http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=163&MId=275&Ver=4	28 April 2016	PTE/16/22