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P8_TA(2019)0082

Sustainable use of pesticides

European Parliament resolution of 12 February 2019 on the implementation of Directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides (2017/2284(INI))

(2020/C 449/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 850/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on persistent organic pollutants and amending Directive 79/117/EEC ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 February 2005 on maximum residue levels of pesticides in or on food and feed of plant and animal origin and amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC (Maximum Residue Level Regulation) ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), establishing a European Chemicals Agency, amending Directive 1999/45/EC and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1488/94 as well as Council Directive 76/769/EEC and Commission Directives 91/155/EEC, 93/67/EEC, 93/105/EC and 2000/21/EC ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC ⁽⁵⁾;
- having regard to the European Implementation Assessment on the Regulation and to its relevant annexes, as published by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) in April 2018,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 637/2008 and Council Regulation (EC) No 73/2009 ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to Council Directive 98/24/EC of 7 April 1998 on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work ⁽⁷⁾ and to Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens and mutagens at work ⁽⁸⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 70, 16.3.2005, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 136, 29.5.2007, p. 3.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 608.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 131, 5.5.1998, p. 11.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 229, 29.6.2004, p. 23.

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- having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) ⁽¹⁾ and to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (the Wild Birds Directive) ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Council Directive 98/83/EC of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to Commission Directive 2009/90/EC of 31 July 2009 laying down, pursuant to Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, technical specifications for chemical analysis and monitoring of water status ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2009/127/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 amending Directive 2006/42/EC with regard to machinery for pesticide application ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2013/39/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 August 2013 amending Directives 2000/60/EC and 2008/105/EC as regards priority substances in the field of water policy ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (COM(2018)0392),
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document entitled 'Agriculture and Sustainable Water Management in the EU' (SWD(2017)0153),
- having regard to the communication of 12 July 2006 from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'A thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides' (COM(2006)0373 — SEC(2006)0894 — SEC(2006)0895 — SEC(2006)0914), ⁽⁸⁾
- having regard to its resolution of 7 June 2016 on enhancing innovation and economic development in future European farm management ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 June 2016 on technological solutions for sustainable agriculture in the EU ⁽¹⁰⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 February 2017 on low-risk pesticides of biological origin ⁽¹¹⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2017 on the draft Commission implementing regulation renewing the approval of the active substance glyphosate in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market, and amending the Annex to Implementing Regulation (EU) No 540/2011 ⁽¹²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 1 March 2018 on prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector ⁽¹³⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 330, 5.12.1998, p. 32.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 201, 1.8.2009, p. 36.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 310, 25.11.2009, p. 29.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 226, 24.8.2013, p. 1.

⁽⁸⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52006DC0372>

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 86, 6.3.2018, p. 62.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 86, 6.3.2018, p. 51.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 184.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 346, 27.9.2018, p. 117.

⁽¹³⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0057.

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- having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2018 on the implementation of the Plant Protection Products Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the ongoing European Implementation Assessment on Directive 2009/128/EC on establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides and to the report published by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) on 15 October 2018,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1185/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2009 concerning statistics on pesticides ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1185/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2009 concerning statistics on pesticides (COM(2017)0109),
- having regard to the Special Report of 2014 of the European Court of Auditors entitled 'Integration of EU water policy objectives with the CAP: a partial success',
- having regard to the Commission report of 10 October 2017 on Member State National Action Plans and on progress in the implementation of Directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides (COM(2017)0587),
- having regard to the overview report of October 2017 by the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) on the implementation of Member States' measures to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides under Directive 2009/128/EC ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 22 November 2016 entitled 'Next steps for a sustainable European future: European Action for Sustainability' (COM(2016)0739),
- having regard to the 7th Environment Action Programme ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the 2017 UN report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food drafted pursuant to UN Human Rights Council resolutions 6/2, 31/10 and 32/8 ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to the Implementation Plan on increasing low-risk plant protection product availability and accelerating integrated pest management implementation in Member States, developed by the Expert Group on Sustainable Plant Protection and endorsed by the Council on 28 June 2016 ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to the resolution of the French Senate of 19 May 2017 on limiting the use of pesticides in the European Union ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2019 on the Union's authorisation procedure for pesticides ⁽⁸⁾
- having regard to the scientific study on flying insect biomass published on 18 October 2017 ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0356.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 324, 10.12.2009, p. 1

⁽³⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/overview_reports/details.cfm?rep_id=114

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 171.

⁽⁵⁾ <http://www.pan-uk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/United-Nations-Report-of-the-Special-Rapporteur-on-the-right-to-food.pdf>

⁽⁶⁾ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10041-2016-ADD-1/en/pdf>

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.senat.fr/leg/ppr16-477.html>

⁽⁸⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0023.

⁽⁹⁾ Caspar A. Hallmann et al., 'More than 75 % decline over 27 years in total flying insect biomass in protected areas', PLOS, 18 October 2017 — <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0185809>

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- having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A8-0045/2019),
- A. whereas Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of pesticides (hereinafter ‘the Directive’) provides for a range of actions to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides in the EU, by reducing the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment and promoting the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and alternative plant protection approaches or techniques, such as non-chemical alternatives and low-risk plant protection products (PPPs) as defined in Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, the aim being to reduce pesticide dependency and safeguard human and animal health and the environment;
- B. whereas the Directive is a valuable tool for ensuring that the environment, ecosystems, and human and animal health are well protected from hazardous substances in pesticides, while providing sustainable and ecological solutions for a larger and more varied toolbox to eliminate and prevent yield losses caused by pests, disease, weeds and invasive alien species and combating pathogen resistance build-up; whereas a full and comprehensive implementation of the Directive is a prerequisite for achieving a high degree of protection and accomplishing a transition towards sustainable agriculture, the production of safe and healthy food, and a non-toxic environment which ensures a high level of protection for human and animal health;
- C. whereas whilst IPM can help to prevent yield losses caused by pests, its main purposes is to enable users of pesticides to switch to practices and products with the lowest risk to human health and the environment, as outlined in Article 14 of the Directive; notes that, in any case, many studies have shown that pesticide use can be significantly reduced without any negative impacts on yield;
- D. whereas the Directive has to be read in conjunction with the other two main pieces of legislation covering the complete lifecycle of a pesticide, starting from its placing on the market (Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009) and ending with the setting of maximum residue levels (Regulation (EC) No 396/2005); whereas it is therefore impossible to achieve the Directive’s objective of protecting human health and the environment from the risks associated with the use of pesticides without fully implementing and properly enforcing the entire ‘pesticides package’;
- E. whereas, in order to reduce the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment, the Commission and the Member States should address the issue of counterfeit and illegal pesticides, as well as the worrying problem of imported agricultural products treated with chemicals that are either banned or restricted in the EU;
- F. whereas the current practices of the Commission and the Member States regarding the approval of active substances and authorisation of plant protection products are not compatible with the objectives and purpose of the directive; whereas these current practices impede attaining the highest possible level of protection and achieving the transition to a sustainable agricultural sector and a non-toxic environment;
- G. whereas the available evidence clearly shows that the implementation of the directive is not sufficiently aligned with related EU policies in the field of pesticides, agriculture and sustainable development, notably but not exclusively the common agricultural policy (CAP) and the Plant Protection Products Regulation; whereas the directive, alongside related actions at EU level, has great potential to further enhance and add value to national efforts and actions in the agricultural sector and strengthen protection for the environment and human health;
- H. whereas the current regulatory framework, including the data requirements, was designed for the assessment and management of chemical PPPs, and is thus ill-fitting for low-risk biological active substances and products; whereas this ill-fitting framework is significantly slowing down the market entry of low-risk biological PPPs, often deterring applicants; whereas this hinders innovation and hampers the competitiveness of EU agriculture; whereas this also leads to over 60 active substances identified by the European Commission as candidates for substitution not being replaced given the lack of safer alternatives, including low-risk biological active substances;

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- I. whereas there is a lack of availability of low-risk PPPs, including biological ones; whereas only 13 substances are approved as low-risk active substances, 12 of these being biological, out of a total of almost 500 available on the EU market; whereas the insufficient implementation of the directive has de facto created an unlevelled playing field in Europe with diverging national practices impeding the optimal uptake of sustainable alternatives on the market; whereas this situation has made it difficult for alternative low-risk and non-chemical products to sufficiently penetrate the EU market, which reduces their attractiveness to farmers, who may instead opt for more cost-effective alternatives in the short term; whereas the lack of availability of low-risk PPPs, including biological ones, hinders the development and implementation of integrated pest management (IPM);
- J. whereas organic agriculture plays an important role as a low-pesticide input system and should be further encouraged;
- K. whereas there is increasing evidence of an ongoing massive decline in the insect population in Europe, which is being linked to current levels of pesticide use; whereas the observed sharp decline in insect numbers has negative impacts on the entire ecosystem and on biological diversity, but also on the agricultural sector and its future economic wellbeing and output;
- L. whereas Europe currently stands at a crossroads that will determine the future of the agriculture sector and the Union's possibilities of achieving a sustainable use of pesticides, most notably through the reform of the CAP; whereas reforming the CAP brings with it a substantial potential to strengthen the streamlining and harmonisation of policies as well as the implementation of the directive, and to facilitate the transition towards more environmentally sustainable agricultural practices;
- M. whereas the use of conventional PPPs is increasingly subject to public debate, owing to the potential risks they pose to human and animal health and the environment;
- N. whereas it is important to promote the development of alternative procedures or techniques in order to reduce dependence on conventional pesticides and deal with the rising resistance to conventional PPPs;
- O. whereas Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 obliges the Council to ensure that the statutory management requirement as laid down in Annex III to Council Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 of 29 September 2003 establishing common rules for direct support schemes under the common agricultural policy and establishing certain support schemes for farmers ⁽¹⁾ incorporates the principles of IPM, including good plant protection practice and non-chemical methods of plant protection and pest and crop management;
- P. whereas IPM implementation is mandatory in the EU, in line with the directive; whereas Member States and local authorities should place more emphasis on the sustainable use of pesticides, including low-risk plant protection alternatives;
- Q. whereas the 'sustainable use' of pesticides cannot be realised without taking into account human exposure to combinations of active substances and co-formulants, as well as their cumulative and possible aggregate and synergistic effects on human health;

Main conclusions

1. Recalls the specific objectives of the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides as, inter alia, the minimisation of hazards and risks to health and the environment from the use of pesticides; improved controls on the use and distribution of pesticides; reduction in the levels of harmful active substances including through substituting the most dangerous with safer, including non-chemical alternatives; encouraging low-input or pesticide free cultivation; and the establishment of a transparent system for reporting and monitoring progress towards the fulfilment of the objectives of the strategy, including through the development of suitable indicators;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 270, 21.10.2003, p. 1.

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2. Considers it essential to evaluate the implementation of the Directive in conjunction with the EU's overarching pesticides policy, including the rules laid down by the Plant Protection Products Regulation, by Regulation (EU) No 528/2012 (the Biocides Regulation)⁽¹⁾, by the Maximum Residue Level Regulation, and by Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 (the General Food Law)⁽²⁾;

3. Regrets that, despite efforts made, the overall degree of progress in implementation by the Member States is insufficient to meet the Directive's main objectives and to unlock its full potential to reduce the overall risks deriving from pesticide use while also reducing pesticide dependency, promote the transition towards ecologically sustainable and safe plant protection techniques, and achieve the urgently needed environmental and health improvements the Directive was specifically designed for; deplores the three-year delay in submission of the implementation report on the directive by the Commission;

4. Emphasises that the implementation of the Directive must be comprehensive and cover all the required aspects, and that partial implementation, i.e. of certain elements but not others, is insufficient to realise the Directive's overarching purpose of achieving a sustainable use of pesticides; underlines the fact that the implementation of IPM practices, such as non-chemical alternatives and low-risk PPPs, plays a particularly important role in efforts to achieve this objective;

5. Notes that the Commission's 2017 progress report identifies significant gaps in the National Action Plans (NAPs) of Member States, suggesting a lower commitment to protecting the environment and health in some countries, possibly resulting in unfair market competition and an undermining of the single market; reserves the right to refer non-compliant Member States to the Commissioner for competition;

6. Expresses concern at the fact that approximately 80 % of Member States' NAPs contain no specific information on how to quantify the achievement of many of the objectives and targets, particularly as regards targets for IPM and aquatic protection measures; stresses that this greatly complicates the process of measuring the progress made by Member States in fulfilling the main objectives and purpose of the Directive;

7. Is concerned by the fact that the NAPs are inconsistent as regards the establishment of quantitative objectives, targets, measures and timetables for the various action areas, making it impossible to assess the progress made; regrets that only five NAPs set high-level measurable targets, of which four relate to risk reduction and only one to use reduction; regrets the fact that only 11 Member States have produced a revised NAP to date, although the deadline for revision was the end of 2017;

8. Regrets the fact that in many Member States there is not sufficient commitment to IPM practices based on its eight principles with the prioritisation of non-chemical alternatives to pesticides; regrets that one of the main challenges regarding the implementation of IPM, which is the cornerstone of the Directive, seems to be the current lack of appropriate control instruments and methods to assess compliance in the Member States, as well as of clear rules and guidance; underlines the fact that comprehensive implementation of IPM is one of the key measures for reducing dependency on pesticide use in sustainable agriculture, which is environmentally friendly, economically viable and socially responsible and contributes to Europe's food security while strengthening biodiversity and human and animal health, boosting the rural economy and reducing costs for farmers by facilitating the market uptake of non-chemical alternatives and low-risk PPPs in the different European zones; stresses that additional financial incentives and educational measures are needed to strengthen the uptake of IPM practices by individual farms;

(1) Regulation (EU) No 528/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2012 concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products, OJ L 167, 27.6.2012, p. 1.

(2) Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety, OJ L 31, 1.2.2002, p. 1.

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9. Considers that IPM represents a valuable tool for farmers to combat pests and disease and to ensure production yields; notes that an increased uptake of IPM serves the dual purpose of strengthening the protection of the environment and biodiversity, as well as reducing costs for farmers to switch to more sustainable alternatives and reduce the use of conventional pesticides; believes that a greater effort is needed to encourage the uptake of IPM, via research and through Member States' advisory bodies; recalls that IPM can play an important role in reducing the quantities and varieties of pesticides used;

10. Notes that within the IPM toolkit, biological control involves boosting or introducing beneficial species that predate upon and therefore regulate pest populations, keeping them in check; emphasises, therefore, the importance of preferring sustainable biological, physical and other non-chemical methods to chemical pesticides if they provide satisfactory pest control; stresses also the importance of applying chemical pesticides in a selective and targeted manner, since otherwise those beneficial pest control agents risk being wiped out, leaving the crops more susceptible to future attacks;

11. Is concerned that very little progress has been made in promoting and incentivising the innovation, development and uptake of low-risk and non-chemical alternatives to conventional pesticides; notes that a mere handful of NAPs contain incentives for the registration of such alternative products and methods; emphasises that minor uses are particularly vulnerable owing to the scarcity of the relevant active substances;

12. Highlights that sustainable and responsible use of pesticides is a precondition for the authorisation of PPPs;

13. Regrets the lack of availability of low-risk active substances and PPPs, mainly caused by the lengthy evaluation, authorisation and registration process due partly to the fact that the shorter authorisation time-frame of 120 days for such cases is rarely fulfilled at Member State level; emphasises that the current situation is not compliant with the principles of promoting and implementing IPM, and stresses the importance of the availability of low-risk pesticides, adequate research and the sharing of best practices within and among Member States in order to fully utilise the potential of IPM; considers that a faster approval process would stimulate industry research into the development of new low-risk active ingredients, including innovative low-risk substances, thus ensuring that farmers have sufficient plant protection tools at their disposal and enabling them to switch more rapidly to sustainable PPPs and increase IPM's efficacy;

14. Recalls that increased pesticide resistance creates increased use and dependency; notes that greater use of and dependency on pesticides come at a high cost to farmers, both through high input costs and owing to the loss in yields arising from the depletion of soil and reduced soil quality;

15. Notes that increased availability of low-risk PPPs on the market would reduce the risk of resistance to active ingredients, as well as the effects on non-target species linked to commonly used PPPs;

16. Notes in this respect that resistance to pesticide active substances is a biological inevitability in fast-reproducing pests and diseases and is a growing problem; stresses, therefore, that sustainable biological, physical and other non-chemical methods must be preferred to chemical pesticides if they provide satisfactory pest control; recalls that chemical pesticides should be used selectively and in a targeted manner; stresses that otherwise these beneficial pest control agents risk being wiped out, leaving the crops more susceptible to future attacks;

17. Notes further that the best pesticide volume reductions are likely to arise from systemic changes that reduce susceptibility to pest attack, favour structural and biological diversity over monocultures and continuous cropping, and reduce pest resistance to active ingredients; highlights, therefore, the need to focus on, fund and mainstream agro-ecological methods which make the whole farming system more resilient to pests;

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18. Stresses that the CAP in its current form does not sufficiently encourage and incentivise the reduction of farms' dependency on pesticides and the uptake of organic production techniques; considers that specific policy instruments in the post-2020 CAP are required in order to help change farmers' behaviour as regards pesticide use;

19. Deplores the fact that the Commission proposal on the new post-2020 CAP does not incorporate the principle of IPM in the statutory management requirements referred to in Annex III of that proposal; stresses that lack of linkage between the directive and the new CAP model will effectively hamper the reduction of pesticide dependency;

20. Notes that most Member States use national risk indicators to assess, either entirely or in part, the adverse impact of pesticide use; recalls that in spite of the explicit obligation laid down in Article 15 of the Directive, EU-wide harmonised risk indicators have still not been agreed on by the Member States, which makes it all but impossible to compare the progress made in different Member States and across the Union as a whole; welcomes the adoption, on 25 January 2019, of harmonised risk indicators by the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF Committee);

21. Emphasises the fundamental importance of biodiversity and of robust ecosystems, most notably in the case of bees and other pollinating insects, which are essential in order to ensure a healthy and sustainable agricultural sector; underlines that the protection of biodiversity is not exclusively a matter of protecting the environment, but is also a means to ensure Europe's sustained food security in the future;

22. Is deeply concerned about the continuous and potentially irreversible loss of biodiversity in Europe and about the alarming decline of winged insects, including pollinators, as evidenced by the findings of the October 2017 scientific study on flying insect biomass ⁽¹⁾, according to which the flying insect population in 63 nature protection areas in Germany has plummeted by more than 75 % in 27 years; stresses, further, the important decline in common bird species across Europe, possibly arising from the reduced insect population; notes, moreover, the unintentional effects of pesticides on soil and soil organisms ⁽²⁾ and other non-target species; considers that pesticides are one of the main factors responsible for the decline of insects, farmland bird species and other non-target organisms, and further underlines the need for Europe to switch to more sustainable pesticide use and increase the number of non-chemical alternatives and low-risk PPPs for farmers;

23. Maintains that neonicotinoid-based pesticides are playing a particular role in the worrying decline in bee populations across Europe, as can be seen from a range of international studies which have formed the basis for petitions from citizens bearing hundreds of thousands of signatures from all over the continent;

24. Recognises the importance of NAPs and IPM in significantly reducing pesticide usage in order to avoid irreversible biodiversity loss while favouring agro-ecological measures and organic farming wherever possible;

25. Further emphasises that the development of sustainable agricultural choices is necessary to reduce climate change impacts on food security;

26. Expresses particular concern at the continued use of pesticides with active substances that are mutagenic, carcinogenic or toxic for reproduction, or have endocrine-disrupting characteristics and are damaging to humans or animals; emphasises that the use of such pesticides is incompatible with the objectives and purpose of the Directive;

27. Emphasises that the aquatic environment is particularly sensitive to pesticides; welcomes the fact that some Member States have taken a range of measures to protect it from them; regrets, however, that most Member States have not established quantitative targets and timetables for measures to protect the aquatic environment from pesticides, and those that have done so have not specified how the achievement of targets or objectives would be measured; believes that the monitoring of currently used pesticides in the aquatic environment should be improved;

⁽¹⁾ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0185809>

⁽²⁾ https://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/public_path/shared_folder/doc_pub/EUR27607.pdf

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28. Notes that agriculture is one of the main sources that cause water bodies to fail to achieve good chemical status, as it leads to pollution by pesticides; highlights that preventing pesticides entering freshwater systems is more cost-effective than removal technologies, and that Member States must provide appropriate incentives in this regard to farmers; in this regard, also recognises the importance of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive for improving water quality; welcomes the progress made by Member States in tackling priority substances, which has led to fewer water bodies failing to meet standards for substances such as cadmium, lead and nickel, as well as pesticides;

29. Regrets the fact that the deterioration of water resources has increasingly led to additional treatment by drinking water operators in order to ensure that water intended for human consumption complies with the pesticides limits as enshrined in Council Directive 98/83/EC on the quality of water intended for human consumption, with the costs being borne by consumers, not polluters;

30. Stresses that some pesticides are internationally recognised as persistent organic pollutants (POPs), owing to their potential for long-range transport, persistence in the environment and ability to bio-magnify throughout the food chain and bio-accumulate in ecosystems, as well as their significant negative effects on human health;

31. Welcomes the fact that all Member States have established training and certification schemes regarding the use of PPPs, but regrets that in some Member States training obligations are not met for all required subjects listed in Annex I; underlines the importance of training of users in order to ensure the safe and sustainable use of PPPs; considers it fitting to distinguish between professional and amateur users, given that they are not subject to the same obligations; emphasises that both professional and non-professional users of PPPs should receive adequate training;

32. Notes the potential of using intelligent technology and precision farming as means to better administer PPPs and to prevent the dispersion thereof in areas where they are not needed, for instance by means of drone or GPS precision technology; stresses, moreover, that the uptake of such solutions could be improved in Member States if better incorporated into training courses and certification schemes for pesticides users in the NAPs;

33. Stresses that PPPs are used not only in agriculture but also for weed and pest control in areas used by the general public or vulnerable groups as defined in Article 12a of the Directive, including public parks and railways; whereas the use of PPPs in such areas is inappropriate; welcomes the fact that several Member States and numerous regional and local governments have taken action to restrict or prohibit pesticide use in areas used by the general public or vulnerable groups; notes, however, the absence of measurable targets in the majority of Member States;

34. Expresses concern that many Member States have not interpreted the requirement of Article 12(a) correctly, reading it as referring only to non-agricultural use, while in fact vulnerable groups such as those defined in Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 include residents subject to high pesticide exposure over the long term; notes in addition that the Commission has confirmed that there is no legal reason why agricultural application should be excluded from the provisions of Article 12;

35. Notes Member States' continued support for organic agriculture as a low-pesticide input system; welcomes the fact that the number of organic farms has continued to increase in the Union, but notes that progress still varies considerably between Member States;

36. Notes that organic farmers suffer economic losses when their soil and organic produce are contaminated by pesticide use on neighbouring farms via, for example, drift from pesticide spraying and movement of persistent active substances in the environment; points out that, consequently, due to actions beyond their control, organic farmers may be forced to sell their produce as conventional, losing out on their price premium, or may even be decertified;

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37. Notes that, while Member States generally have systems to gather information on acute pesticide poisoning, the accuracy of this data and its use is questioned; highlights the fact that systems for gathering such information on chronic poisoning have not been widely implemented;

38. Highlights the fact that EFSA's latest report on pesticide residues in food showed that 97,2 % of samples throughout Europe were within the legal limits under the EU legislation, which bears witness to an extremely rigorous and safe food production system;

Recommendations

39. Calls on the Member States to complete the implementation of the Directive without further delay;

40. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are included in any stakeholder activities on pesticides, including the public, as provided for in Directive 2003/35/EC and the Aarhus Convention;

41. Calls on the Member States to take a proactive role in the practical implementation of the Directive in order to identify gaps and specific areas which require particular attention with respect to the protection of human health and the environment, and not to confine themselves to the usual national transposition and control mechanisms;

42. Calls on the Member States to acknowledge that the EU must act without delay to transition to a more sustainable use of pesticides, and that the main responsibility for implementing such practices lies with the Member States; emphasises that swift action is essential;

43. Calls on the Member States to adhere to the established timelines for delivering revised NAPs; urges those Member States that have not yet done so to deliver without further delay, this time with clear quantitative targets and a measurable overall objective of an immediate and long-term effective reduction in the risks and impacts of pesticide use, including clearly defined annual reduction targets and with special attention to the possible effects on pollinators and the fostering and uptake of sustainable non-chemical alternatives and low-risk PPPs, in line with the IPM principles;

44. Calls on the Commission to propose an ambitious EU-wide binding target for the reduction of pesticide use;

45. Calls on the Commission to further develop guidance on all the IPM principles and their implementation; asks the Commission in this regard to establish guidelines on the establishment of criteria for measuring and assessing the implementation of IPM in the Member States;

46. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take all requisite measures to promote low-risk pesticides, and to prioritise non-chemical options and methods which entail the least risk of harm to health and the natural environment, while ensuring effective and efficient crop protection; stresses that for this to be successful, the economic incentives for farmers to choose such options must be strengthened;

47. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to place greater emphasis on the promotion of the development, research, registration and marketing of low-risk and biological alternatives, including by increasing funding opportunities within Horizon Europe and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027; recalls the importance of preferring sustainable biological, physical and other non-chemical methods to chemical pesticides if they provide satisfactory pest control; recalls the importance of the added value of ecologically sustainable and safe plant protection techniques;

48. Calls on the Commission, without further delay, to deliver on its commitment under the 7th Environment Action Programme to put forward a Union strategy for a non-toxic environment that is conducive to innovation and the development of sustainable substitutes, including non-chemical solutions; expects the Commission to take particular account in this strategy of the impacts of pesticides on the environment and human health;

49. Encourages more focus on risk reduction, as extensive use of low-risk substances might be more harmful than limited use of high-risk substances;

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50. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure better coherence of the Directive and its implementation with related EU legislation and policies, most notably the provisions of the CAP and Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, and in particular to integrate the IPM principles as legal requirements under the CAP, pursuant to Article 14 of the directive;
51. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strictly limit the number of essential use derogations under Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 and update the relevant guidance documents so as to ensure that the risk assessment of pesticides reflects real-life exposure and conditions and takes into account all possible impacts on health and the environment;
52. Recommends giving Member States the flexibility to apply IPM as part of the greening measures under the CAP;
53. Welcomes the recent adoption of harmonised risk indicators by the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF Committee) and calls on the Member States to move forward with the adoption and implementation of harmonised risk indicators as recently proposed by the Commission, in order to properly monitor the reduction impacts of pesticides;
54. Calls on the Commission to establish a fully operational and transparent system for the regular collection of statistical data on pesticide use, impacts of occupational and non-occupational exposure to pesticides on human and animal health, and presence of pesticide residues in the environment, especially in soil and water;
55. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote research programmes aimed at determining the impacts of pesticide use on human health, taking into account the full range of toxicological and long-term effects, including immunotoxicity, endocrine disruption and neurodevelopmental toxicity, and focusing on the effects of prenatal exposure to pesticides on children's health;
56. Urges the Commission to take a risk-based approach to the management and use of commonly used PPPs that is justified by independent, peer-reviewed scientific evidence;
57. Calls on the Commission to submit, before the end of its current mandate, a specific legislative proposal amending Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, outside of the general revision in connection with the REFIT initiative, with a view to adding a definition and a separate category for 'naturally occurring substances' and 'nature-identical substances', the criterion for which would be the existing presence and exposure of the substance in nature, as well as to establishing a rigorous fast-track evaluation, authorisation and registration procedure for low-risk biological pesticides, in line with Parliament's resolutions of 15 February 2017 on low-risk pesticides of biological origin and 13 September 2018 on the implementation of the Plant Protection Products Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009;
58. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure the effective implementation of the Union's obligations under the Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and the 2004 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and therefore to scale up their efforts to eliminate the manufacturing, placing on the market and use of POP pesticides, together with the establishment of provisions on the disposal of waste containing or contaminated by any of those substances;
59. Calls on the Member States to ensure that professionally qualified and independent advisory services are available to provide advice and training to end-users on the sustainable use of pesticides, and on IPM in particular;
60. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to place greater emphasis on further investment and research into the development and uptake of precision and digital farming technologies in order to render PPPs more efficient and thus significantly reduce pesticide dependency, as per the aims of the directive, thereby reducing the exposure of both professional users and the general public; considers that the use of digitisation or precision farming should not lead to dependency on inputs or financial indebtedness for farmers;

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61. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to no longer allow the use of PPPs in areas used by the general public or vulnerable groups as defined by Article 3(14) of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009;
62. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to pay particular attention to the protection of vulnerable groups, as defined by Article 3(14) of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, especially considering the existing lack of protection of rural residents living in the locality of crops; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to propose immediate bans on the use of pesticides within substantial distances of residents' homes, schools, playgrounds, nurseries and hospitals;
63. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to invest in further research on the impact of pesticides on non-target species and to take immediate action to minimise it;
64. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote an agricultural model which relies on preventive and indirect plant protection strategies aimed at reducing the use of external inputs, and on multifunctional naturally occurring substances; acknowledges the need for more research in and development of preventive and indirect agro-ecological plant health care strategies;
65. Calls on the Member States to increase their investment in adaptation practices that prevent agro-chemical substances from reaching surface and deep water, as well as in measures aimed at containment of possible leaching of these substances into watercourses, rivers and seas; recommends that their use be prohibited in soils potentially draining into groundwater;
66. Stresses the essential need for regular assessment of proportionality between the quantity of pesticides sold and the agricultural area of application, based on user databases and sales records;
67. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure full and uniform application of the hazard-based cut-off criteria for active substances that are mutagenic, carcinogenic or toxic for reproduction, or that have endocrine-disrupting properties;
68. Calls on the Member States to strictly follow the ban on imports of prohibited pesticides into the EU from third countries, and to increase controls on imported food;
69. Calls on the Commission to carefully consider all measures available to ensure compliance, including launching infringement proceedings against Member States which fail to comply with the obligation to fully implement the Directive;
70. Calls on the Commission to take vigorous action against Member States that are systematically abusing derogations concerning banned pesticides containing neonicotinoids;
71. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the 'polluter pays' principle is fully implemented and effectively enforced as regards the protection of water resources;
72. Calls for Horizon Europe to provide sufficient funding to promote the development of plant health care strategies based on a systemic approach combining innovative agro-ecological techniques and preventive measures aimed at reducing the use of external inputs to a minimum;
73. Calls on the Commission to set up a pan-European Platform on Sustainable Pesticides Use that would bring together sectorial stakeholders and representatives at local and regional level so as to facilitate information-sharing and exchange of best practices in reducing pesticides use;

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74. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
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