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March 21, 2017

Senator Ben Allen  
State Capitol, Room 2054  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Scott Wiener  
State Capitol Room, 4066  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support – SB 602 (Allen-Wiener): Pollinator Protection Act**

Dear Senators Allen and Wiener,

On behalf of Pollinator Stewardship Council representing 392 California beekeepers we express our support of SB 602, the Pollinator Protection Act. We agree with the concerns and issues raised by other nonprofit advocates. The success of wild bees and managed honey bees alike is necessary for the continued prosperity of California farmers and the food system.

Managed and native pollinators across California and across the country are declining at an alarming rate. In California alone, beekeepers lost nearly 40 percent of their hives last year (<https://bip2.beeinformed.org/geo/>), more than twice what is considered sustainable. Bees are responsible for one in three bites of food we eat, and billions of dollars in pollinated crops in California each year, and often unaccounted for in backyard gardens and other ecosystems.

Independent scientists say pesticides are the driving factor in bee declines, made worse by existing stresses from poor forage, pests and diseases. In 2014, the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides, a group of global scientists studying the impacts of pesticides, reviewed more than 1100 peer-reviewed studies and determined that a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids – applied to seeds and crops across California – are a key factor in declines, killing some bees outright, but also impairing their ability to communicate, navigate or reproduce.

In the words of the Director-General of FAO at the United Nations, “*we have reached a turning point in agriculture. Today’s dominant agricultural model is highly problematic, not only*

*because of damage inflicted by pesticides, but also their effects on climate change, loss of biodiversity and inability to ensure food sovereignty. These issues are intimately interlinked and must be addressed together to ensure that the right to food is achieved to its full potential. Efforts to tackle hazardous pesticides will only be successful if they address the ecological, economic and social factors that are embedded in agricultural policies, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

The United Nations stated in their, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food,”

*“Fundamental to solving pesticide exposure problems is a shift to ecologically compatible and sustainable farming methods. The UN report notes that safer practices exist, and studies indicate “that agroecology is capable of delivering sufficient yields to feed the entire world population and ensure that they are adequately nourished.”*

In 2009, California officials acknowledged that a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids posed a potential threat to bees and other pollinators and began a more serious review. However, the agency won’t conclude the final version of this assessment and others, as well as potential changes to their use, for at least two more years.

The proposed legislation is a commonsense measure that does two primary things. First, the bill follows the Department’s criteria and makes seven current neonicotinoid pesticides restricted materials. By making the product a restricted material, it places the product in the hands of certified applicators with training and a license. This increases the income for certified applicators, and protects the citrus industry from homeowners misusing the products and contributing to resistance to pesticides by the pest.

Second, the bill would place a label with text and a logo on all seeds and plants sold by retailers that have been pre-treated with neonicotinoids, indicating the potential of the product to harm bees. This information allows purchasers to make informed decisions about seeds and plants for their own homes, businesses and farms, and potentially avoid doing more harm than good to bees. Some retailers across California already provide similar labels, and some have eliminated the use of the products from their supply chain altogether.

The bill also allows for the citrus industry – appropriately concerned about citrus greening disease – to apply the products with trained professionals or state or federal officials can continue to apply them if it deems an emergency situation. It remains good public policy to take bee-harming products out of the hands of untrained professionals prone to misuse or overuse.

By placing bee-harming products only in the hands of those with training, and providing seed and plant purchasers with information about what they are buying, California can help provide leadership in reducing the risk of exposure, and protecting pollinators that are critical to the success of farms and back yard gardens alike.

As California enacts its State Pollinator Protection Plan (<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/pollinators/index.htm>), education of consumers is integral to behavior change. Providing complete information of where pesticides are applied, onto seeds, or in the soil of plants, meets the criteria of education to create an informed public about the issues impacting pollinator health.

We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you, your staff and future committees to pass SB 602.

Sincerely,

  
Michele Colopy  
Program Director

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, United Nations, Human Rights Council, Thirty-fourth session, 27 February-24 March 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/017/85/PDF/G1701785.pdf?OpenElement>