

No Decision on Bee-Harming Pesticides in Europe

By DAVID JOLLY

A proposed measure to restrict the use of pesticides that have been implicated in bee die-offs around the world was left in limbo on Friday, after representatives from Britain and Germany, two of the largest members of the European Union, abstained from the voting in Brussels. The move left the committee without the needed qualified majority, which gives larger countries greater weight than smaller ones.

The proposal was based on a recent report from the European Food Safety Authority recommending that no pesticide containing chemicals known as neonicotinoids be used on crops that are attractive to honeybees, because of the risk that the insects would be poisoned.

Frédéric Vincent, a spokesman for the [European Commission](#), said that for the moment officials in Brussels, including the European health commissioner, Tonio Borg, would “reflect” on what steps to take next, adding: “This isn’t the end of the story.”

Mr. Vincent said the commission could go back to member states on the committee with a revised proposal for a new vote. Alternatively, he said, the commission could ask the member states to hold another vote on the same proposal, and were there to be no qualified majority, the proposal could be enacted under the authority of the European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union.

The commission has that power, Mr. Vincent said, because “in that case the member states wouldn’t be making a decision.”

The commission has used that power in other contentious agricultural cases, like in March 2010, when it approved the cultivation of a genetically modified potato in the face of public opposition.

In all, 13 countries voted in favor of the proposal, including France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. Nine voted against, and five abstained, including Germany and Britain.

Bees of all kinds, which are essential to agriculture and ecosystems, have been dying by the millions over the last decade for reasons that are not fully understood. Mites and viruses are among the major culprits, but studies have also suggested that the neonicotinoid pesticides are contributing to the problem.

The makers of the pesticides, including the German giant Bayer CropScience and the big Swiss biochemical company Syngenta, claim that the available scientific evidence does not justify broad restrictions.