



STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

ON THE NEED FOR A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF SUBSPECIES AND ECOTYPES OF HONEY BEES NATIVE TO THE TERRITORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

WHEREAS

The honey bee species, *Apis mellifera*, appeared on the European continent a million years ago. Through natural evolution, it has adapted to its climate, flora and geographical surroundings, which resulted in several subspecies.

Each of these subspecies has thus acquired specific and hereditary characteristics that distinguish it from the others. Nevertheless, there is sexual compatibility between subspecies.

These subspecies were formed outside of any human influence, since humans began to exploit bees by providing them with shelter in hives only about 5,000 years ago;

Within each of these subspecies indigenous to the territory of the European Union, there are still different ecotypes, which have been developed in the same way;

WHEREAS

The diversity of these bees have constituted a natural heritage of great value, and worthy of conservation;

It is also in the interest of humankind to safeguard the natural heritage of *Apis mellifera* because those subspecies are better pollinators of wild flora and cultures when they are in their natural habitat than those who are not;

WHEREAS

Since the end of the 19th century, the heritage of *Apis mellifera* has been threatened by constant importation of non-indigenous bees, and that this phenomenon has seriously increased in recent decades, leading to high rates of hybridization of indigenous populations in some Member States of the European Union, which not only inevitably dilutes the original genetic characteristics of *Apis mellifera* but also could lead to their extinction¹;

The scientific community recognises, apart from the causes linked to the agricultural model and in particular the widespread use of pesticides, genetic contamination as one of the causes that could explain the generally catastrophic situation of beekeeping in the Union², which is victim in particular of abnormal deaths in the colonies observed over the last fifteen years;

In order to curb this genetic pollution, local initiatives for conservation areas have been developing for some 50 years, but are often precarious insofar as national public authorities generally do not support them legally, either by introducing the possibility of creating bee reserves, by regulating bee imports and introductions according to genetic criteria, or by elaborating rules to encourage the use of local bees;

Several Member States have also introduced legislation and regulations to ensure the genetic conservation of subspecies or even ecotypes of *Apis mellifera*, on a local or even national scale. Some examples include : Slovenia protected its native bee, *Apis mellifera carnica*, throughout its territory, the municipality of Chimay, in 2004, Belgium, through a municipal regulation prohibited the use of subspecies of bees other than black bees, *Apis mellifera mellifera*; La Palma, one of the Spanish Canary Islands, has also prohibited the introduction of exogenous bees into its territory; the island of Læsø in Denmark has been designated a protected area for black bees;; and finally, on the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay, a Scottish Government regulation prohibited the possession of another subspecies of bee than *Apis mellifera mellifera*³;

Several third European States already legally protect their indigenous honey bee(s) by delimiting areas reserved for its/their breeding, in the counties of Vest-Agder and Rogaland, Norway, for example, as well as the cantons of Glarus and Obwalden, Switzerland, where protected areas for *Apis mellifera mellifera* have been created;

Nevertheless, these measures are insufficient to ensure proper protection of the local subspecies and ecotypes of *Apis mellifera* throughout the Union. The issue of conserving the subspecies of honey bees native to the European Union must be addressed at its whole territory level.

1 Ellis, Jonathan *et al.*, 2018. Introgression in native populations of *Apis mellifera mellifera* L: implications for conservation. *Journal of Insect Conservation*.

2 AFP, 8 octobre 2019 : 2019, année noire pour les apiculteurs européens.
<https://www.geo.fr/environnement/2019-annee-noire-pour-les-apiculteurs-europeens-197962>

3 The United Kingdom, and therefore Scotland, should no longer be part of the European Union's territories as of 31 January 2020.

WHEREAS

The Union is a party to the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1982), Article 11 of which states that the signatories undertake "*to strictly control the introduction of non-native species*";

The Union is a party to the Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Article 8.a. of which states that its signatories undertake to establish "*a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity*" - its Article 2 defining biological diversity as the "*variability among living organisms from all sources*" including, in particular, "*diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems*" - and Article 8.h. states that its signatories undertake to prevent the introduction and control or eradicate "*those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species*";

The Court of Justice of the European Communities, in its decision *Criminal Procedure v Ditlev Bluhme* of 3 December 1998 on Case C-67/97 concerning the black bee of the Danish island of Læsø, held that national measures for the genetic preservation of indigenous populations of honey bees with distinctive characteristics are in conformity with Community law, considering that such measures contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity by guaranteeing the livelihood of the population concerned, *a fortiori* when its genes are recessionary;

In its Resolution on bee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector of 15 November 2011 (2011/2108 (INI)), the European Parliament requested the Commission to provide funds to support projects and actions to conserve the native *Apis mellifera* subspecies and ecotypes in each region (point 43), and called on it to study the possibility of creating a programme or regulation under the Life+ financial instrument that would make it possible to establish a pan-European project for the recovery of wild populations of these subspecies (point 50);

Regulation (EU) No 1143 of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species defines these species as "*any live specimen of a species, subspecies or lower taxon of animals [...] introduced outside its natural range [...] as well as any hybrids, varieties or breeds that might survive and subsequently reproduce [...] whose introduction or spread has been found to threaten or adversely impact upon biodiversity and related ecosystem services*" (Article 3);

The Regulation states that the threats posed by these species to biodiversity and associated ecosystem services take on different forms, "*including severe impacts on native species and the structure and functioning of ecosystems through [...] the replacement of native species throughout a significant proportion of range and through genetic effects by hybridisation*" (point 3);

WHEREAS

The European Parliament voted on 1 March 2018 on an own-initiative report on *Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector* (2017/2115 (INI));

This text "*underlines the need to preserve the extraordinary genetic heritage, diversity and capacity for adaptation of local, endemic honeybee populations, each tailored over generations to the particularities of their local environment, recalling that this diversity is important in the fight against invasive species, including parasites and diseases*" (item 20);

It "*calls on the Commission to draw up an inventory to evaluate the existing and emerging health risks at EU and international level, with the aim of establishing an action plan to combat bee mortality*" (paragraph 23);

And it "*calls on the Member States and the regions to use all means possible to protect local and regional honeybee species (strains of Apis Mellifera bees) from the undesirable spread of naturalised or invasive alien species having a direct or indirect impact on pollinators; supports the repopulation of hives lost through invasive alien species with bees of local native species; recommends Member States to create centres devoted to the breeding and safeguarding of native bee species; underlines in this regard the importance of developing breeding strategies to increase the frequencies of valuable traits in local honeybee populations [...]*" (item 30).

→ IT IS IMPERATIVE AND URGENT THAT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES OF THE UNION:

- **IMPLEMENT THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO SAFEGUARD THE SUBSPECIES OF HONEY BEES NATIVE TO THE TERRITORY OF THE UNION, FOR THE HERITAGE, ECOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS THAT DEPEND ON THEM;**
- **AND IN PARTICULAR, URGENTLY ESTABLISH LEGAL PROTECTION FOR THE CONSERVATION AREAS OF THESE SUBSPECIES AND ECOTYPES OF *APIS MELLIFERA*.**

SIGNATORY (first name, surname, position, organization, date):