

# META MORPHOSIS



## TOWARDS A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH FOR EUROPE

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### Editorial

People in the western world have never been so obsessed with or conscious of their health. From billboards to newspaper headlines, we are bombarded with messages about what to eat, what exercise we should take, or the launch of a new product that will miraculously shift those extra pounds. Despite all this, never have so many people been overweight and while we are living longer, many people are ending their lives with chronic health problems. Some of these issues are caused by poor lifestyle choices, but increasingly researchers are laying the blame for them at the door of environmental pollution. This is where the EU can make a real difference. By being tough on air pollution and hazardous chemicals and ridding Europe of dirty fossil fuels, EU leaders can save lives and help all citizens have a clean bill of health.

Despite some success in reducing emissions of some pollutants, the air in most European cities remains polluted and dangerous for our health. This situation has not been helped by car manufacturers cheating emissions tests and churning out more pollution than they should. The car industry is now under the spotlight to see whether or not manufacturers are willing to stick

to the rules, but as the EU enters the final straights of updating air quality laws, there are worrying signs that some EU member states are still not ready to tackle other root causes of air pollution, notably emissions from intensive farming practices. Here, a mere 5% of EU farms cause a whopping 80% of ammonia emissions. And with emissions from other pollutants set to decrease significantly in the coming decades, ammonia from farming is becoming one of the biggest causes of loss of life and illnesses from dirty air.

The EEB, with other NGOs, is therefore continuing to push hard to mitigate the worst effects of the weak Environment Council position on the National Emission Ceilings (NEC) directive agreed last December (see page 7).

In addition to the air we breathe, the chemicals in the products that surround us in our daily lives, including those we put directly on our bodies, are another significant source of potential harm to human health. The EEB is concerned that the Commission could water down the hard-won victory represented by the EU chemicals legislation REACH by taking an

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## EEB MEMBER FOCUS

News from EEB members and working groups



### POLLINATION – THE KEY TO PRESERVING LIFE

**Over 70% of human nutrition and food depends on the work of natural pollinators such as bees and other pollinating insects. They are the key link in the ecosystem, without which life on Earth would become impossible for the majority of its inhabitants. Besides being food sources for most living creatures, plants absorb carbon dioxide, levels of which have constantly growing during the past two centuries because of human activity.**

Wild and managed pollinators are seriously in danger because of, among other factors, an increasingly intensive use of agrochemicals and a decrease in natural

and semi-natural habitats. Recent scientific studies have shown that modern intensive agriculture leads to a decrease in the pollination of crops, fruits, vegetables and wild flowers as bees and other pollinators lose their habitats and access to natural food sources. Indeed, monoculture planting is one of the main reasons why the honey bee is increasingly malnourished.

A move to environmentally-friendly agriculture, which includes organic farming methods, biodiversity conservation and the restoration of habitats, is feasible and is the best way of safeguarding pollinators from the effects of toxic chemicals.

EEB member organisation "Europe and We" from Bulgaria is working to promote green agriculture practices: minimising the use of agrochemicals; protecting wild

and managed pollinators; and preserving biodiversity and global food safety. It plans a series of international activities around this theme, including a study about nectariferous and melliferous plants in the Strandzha mountain region on the border of Turkey and Bulgaria; information campaigns; capacity building events for farmers, beekeepers, policy- and decision-makers; and beekeeping courses for schools.

The actions are aimed at raising awareness about the importance and benefits of pollination for the present and future of the planet, and at developing environmentally-friendly behaviour among the general public, in particular among agriculture producers and young people.

[Maria Velikova, Project Manager "Europe and We" Bulgaria and beekeeper](#)

## SUCCESS CORNER

News from EEB members and working groups



### PVC BANNED FROM ECO-LABELLED FOOTWEAR AND FURNITURE

**In a sudden burst of good news for the EU Ecolabel, experts agreed last month that footwear and furniture products coveting the environmental excellence label must be PVC-free. This is an important step, not just for these products, but for the Ecolabel as a whole, showing that it is making a serious effort to remove toxic chemicals from EU consumer goods.**

The environmental community has widely applauded the decision. Indeed, PVC is not allowed in other national Ecolabels, such as the Nordic Swan and the Blue Angel, due to its harmful impacts on the environment and health throughout its lifecycle. However, its exclusion from the EU Ecolabel has always been difficult because of strong lobbying by the PVC industry. An earlier process to set EU Ecolabel criteria for furniture failed over a

decade ago because of a lack of agreement regarding the exclusion of PVC.

However, pressure for change is growing as citizens in Europe become more aware of the impacts of their consumption on the environment and their health. Nine out of ten EU citizens believe that buying environmentally-friendly products can make a difference and at least one-third is concerned about hazardous chemicals in products.

Public authorities must therefore fight greenwashing and help consumers to make informed choices. With three quarters of products on the market containing environmental claims, trust and understanding of environmental information is difficult for a majority of citizens. Robust and reliable labelling is therefore crucial.

The EU Ecolabel, displayed on more than 44,700 products and services in the EU,

has strong legal provisions to reduce the products' main environmental impacts and substitute hazardous chemicals, and environmental NGOs and consumer organisations have a say in criteria development. Public authorities must also ensure that the process is not guided by vested interests, but this is not always an easy task given the active participation of the chemicals industry wanting to push its own agenda.

The exclusion of PVC in the EU Ecolabel is an important step to encourage the substitution of toxic chemicals, paving the way for products which are safer for consumers and can be recycled more easily without re-injecting toxic chemicals into the production cycle and contributing to a more sustainable and circular economy.

[Blanca Morales, EU Ecolabel Coordinator](#)