The Use of Neonicotinoids and the effects on Bees in Australia

Neonicotinoids (or neonics) are the most widely used insecticide in the world. However, for the past thirty years these insecticides have been known to pose a significant threat to butterflies, birds and aquatic insects. Bees, however, are most adversely affected by these chemicals as they disturb the central nervous system of these insects. Bees have more receptors for these insecticides in their bodies and fewer genes for detoxification, which increases their genetic vulnerability to neonics.

Unlike contact pesticides that remain on the surface of the treated foliage, neonics are systemic, absorbed by the plant and transported around it to all its tissue. This includes its leaves, flowers, roots, stems, as well as the pollen and nectar that bees feed on. Neonics are applied at the root or sprayed onto crop foliage, and remain active for many weeks, protecting the crop throughout the season. They are often used to treat cereals, ornamental pot plants, turf and glasshouse crops such as apples and pears. In Australia, these chemicals are used heavily on corn, canola and cotton crops.

Recently, the European Member States banned the outdoor use of neonics. The European Food Safety Authority published risk assessment reports which brought to light considerable problems with these insecticides. Scientific assessors concluded that the use of neonics results in a high risk to the life of both wild and honey bees due to genetic factors that amplify the effect of these chemicals, as well as the insecticide contaminating soil and water in the environment. As a result, the European Commission voted positively to heavily ban their outdoor use. However, these measures have not been adopted in Australia.

As bees are vital pollinators to Australian food crops, when elected, the Health Australia Party will immediately:

- Call for a ban of these insecticides given the increased evidence to suggest that these chemicals are adversely affecting the health of bee populations in Australia (both introduced and native).

- Establish a program between professional beekeepers, farmers, National industry bodies (such as the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and Plant Health Australia) and local bee associations to closely monitor bee health in areas where neonics are in use.