

Brussels, 23 April 2026

Position

The use of drones for aerial spraying in the context of the European legislative procedure 2025/0409¹ (COD), which aims to amend Directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides. This includes the possibility of using drones for the aerial application of plant protection products.

The European Parliament's **Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)**, together with the **Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)**, are involved in examining and issuing opinions on this legislative procedure. In this context, we would like to bring to the attention of decision-makers several concerns raised by civil society organisations, beekeepers in Europe, and small- and medium-sized farmers that we believe should be endorsed across all EU countries.

The proposed procedure aims to amend the framework established by Directive 2009/128/EC, which currently prohibits the aerial spraying of pesticides and allows for limited, strictly regulated derogations. The **European Commission's initiative introduces the possibility of granting general derogations for certain types of drones**, provided that the associated risks to human health and the environment are assessed as equal to or lower than those of ground-based pesticide application.

Although digital technologies and precision agriculture can bring real benefits in certain contexts, the debate over the use of drones for pesticide spraying requires **rigorous scientific analysis and a transparent assessment of their impacts on the environment, biodiversity, and public health by the Authorities before allowing them**. In the documents available to date, we have not identified any independent, comprehensive studies that conclusively demonstrate that the use of drones for pesticide spraying systematically reduces the risks of drift, ecosystem contamination, or pollinator exposure.

A similar legislative process is currently underway in various EU Member States, aimed at amending national frameworks for pesticide use to authorise drone-based aerial spraying. France recently updated their legislation², imposing some restrictions to potential temporary authorisations (it has to be a severe sanitary issue without any other solution, to be co-signed by the 3 involved Ministers, Public Health, Environment and Agriculture and only when there is a clear advantage for human health and the environment) and precautionary measures such as an experimentation phase before the authorisation of the uses or crops/parcels with environmental constraints, e.g., slopes superior or equal 20%³. After the experiments, the results are evaluated by

¹ [https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2025/0409\(COD\)](https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2025/0409(COD))

² [Baromètre de l'application des lois - Assemblée nationale](#)

³ [LOI n° 2025-365 du 23 avril 2025 visant à améliorer le traitement des maladies affectant les cultures végétales à l'aide d'aéronefs télépilotés](#)

the independent national agency for environmental and food safety, ANSES.

In Romania, the use of drones for aerial spraying was approved⁴. Representative organisations of beekeepers, organic farmers and civil society have publicly expressed serious concerns about the potential impact of such a measure on biodiversity, pollinators and public health. In this regard, Romanian civil society organisations have submitted several letters and documents to national authorities and Romanian parliamentarians, **presenting technical, legal, and public policy arguments against the legalisation of aerial pesticide spraying using drones**⁵. These documents reflect the concerns of an important segment of society – beekeepers, small- and medium-sized farmers, and environmental organisations. These groups are directly affected by regulations governing pesticide use in agriculture.

The experience of national debates in Romania can provide a **useful perspective for the European legislative process**, especially regarding:

- the need to **apply the precautionary principle** in the use of pesticides;
- **assessing the effects on pollinators and biodiversity**, essential elements for long-term food security;
- the **right to a healthy environment**, which is recognised by European Union law through the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 37 – environmental protection) as well as through the Union's obligation to ensure a high level of environmental protection in all its policies;
- **avoiding regulations that could lead to increased uncontrolled dispersion of pesticides** or make it difficult for the authorities to monitor and control them.

When considering the use of a so-called UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) for pesticide spraying, several factors may affect treatment efficacy: (1) spraying and flight settings (pump pressure, flight height and speed, etc.), (2) load capacity, (3) weather conditions (specifically, wind direction and velocity), (4) flight range, and (5) environmental dispersion (drift effect and ground leaking). Among the imperative technical improvements drones must follow, nozzles are a crucial component for reducing droplet dispersion and improving target coverage, thereby reducing pesticide drift. Several companies in Europe have already begun developing “Unmanned Aircraft Systems” (UAS, as proposed in the Food and Feed Omnibus) for aerial spraying, but their characteristics are not yet standardised and remain far from risk-free. Further research is needed to find the best solutions to make these technological developments as efficient as possible for the plant, human (applicators and citizens), pollinators and environmental health.

As a result, **BeeLife and its members request that, before any modifications in Directive 2009/128/EC and national law are made, it is absolutely essential that:**

- **All drone components, including spraying equipment, are tested and specified with precise approval and operating conditions tailored to local conditions and the crops involved.**
- **The equipment must also be fitted with a tracking system to ensure complete monitoring of drone activity.**
- **The resulting information is of public interest and is immediately collected/integrated online in the farm's electronic treatment records, which are shared with the authorities and made publicly accessible in an open, anonymised manner.**

⁴ Cf. <http://senat.ro:251494FS.PDF>

⁵<https://www.romapis.org/img/Open%20Letter%20against%20Lehalizing%20Aerial%20Drone%20Spraying%20of%20Pesticides.pdf>

- **Specific operator certification for drone spraying and personal protective equipment (as for all PPP uses) to ensure safety and minimise health risks and the risk of misuse is essential.**

These demands are translated into specific proposals to modify the articles in the Omnibus proposal, as shown in the table below.

Finally, as drones are already working “connected” and integrating technological developments (such as sensors, GPS, chips, cameras, etc.), they present an opportunity to improve knowledge of pesticide use in the fields. Data collected by these machines (such as the volume sprayed, the location, the treatment period, etc.) must be automatically recorded and transmitted to the electronic recordings of farmers, and enrich the public database of pesticide uses, which is then communicated to the European institutions, as is the case for any other pesticide application.

Article / Annex point	Current text in force	Proposed new text	BeeLife proposed amendments	Justification
Article 3, point 5	'aerial spraying' means application of pesticides from an aircraft (aeroplane or helicopter);	'aerial spraying' means application of pesticides from a manned aircraft or an unmanned aircraft system;	N/A	
Article 3, point 5a (new)	Not existing.	'unmanned aircraft system' means any aircraft with equipment for aerial application of pesticides, operating autonomously or piloted remotely without a pilot on board;	'unmanned aircraft system' means any aircraft with equipment for aerial application of pesticides, operating autonomously or piloted remotely without a pilot on board. <i>The system must be surveilled during pesticide application permanently.</i>	
Article 9(1)	Member States shall ensure that aerial spraying is prohibited.	The prohibition provided for in the first subparagraph may only be derogated from in accordance with paragraphs 2 to 6 of this Article or with Article 9a.		
Article 9(2), first sentence	By way of derogation from paragraph 1, aerial spraying may only be allowed in special cases provided the following conditions are met:	By way of derogation from paragraph 1, aerial spraying may be allowed in special cases provided the following conditions are met:		

Article 9a (new) Not existing.

Article 9a
Aerial spraying of pesticides by unmanned aircraft systems

1. By way of further derogation from Article 9(1), Member States may, in the case of professional users, exempt from the prohibition laid down in that Article, the aerial spraying of pesticides by unmanned aircraft systems identified pursuant to paragraph 2.
Pesticides to be used for aerial spraying by such unmanned aircraft systems shall be explicitly authorised for that use by the Member State under Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 following a specific assessment addressing risks from aerial spraying.

2. The Commission shall adopt a delegated act by [OP: please insert the date = 4 years after the entry into force of this Directive] in accordance with Article 20a, supplementing this Directive to identify the types of unmanned aircraft systems that have lower or equal risks compared to the risks arising from land-based application equipment for the same use.

Article 9a
Aerial spraying of pesticides by unmanned aircraft systems is permitted only if it is scientifically and technically proven that this method of application does not cause unintended drift and complies with the authorisation criteria set out in Article 4.

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3. Member States shall ensure that:

— ***the label of the pesticides to be used for aerial spraying sets out the risk mitigation measures to minimise drift and unintended exposure,***

— ***the conditions of the authorisation, in particular for spray aerial applications, include risk mitigation measures to protect non-target arthropods and bees,***

— ***monitoring programmes are initiated to verify the real exposure of non-target arthropods, including bees, to the active ingredients formulated in the plant***

[In line with the additional measures that were proposed when neonicotinoids were unexpectedly released in the environment following seed treatment \(https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/21/oj/eng\). specific conditions are proposed to follow up on possible drift of aerial spraying](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/21/oj/eng)

Article 9b (new)	Not existing.	<p><i>protection products in areas extensively used by bees for foraging or by beekeepers, where and as appropriate.';</i></p> <p>9b. To avoid PPP residue drift and protect humans, animals and the environment as mentioned in Article 55 of Regulation (EU) 1107/2009 and national guides of good spraying practices, it is forbidden to apply PPP by unmanned aircraft systems if the wind force is higher than 3 km/h.</p> <p><i>In line with other pesticide application equipment, all drone components, including spraying equipment, are tested and specified with precise approval and operating conditions tailored to local conditions and the crops involved.</i></p> <p><i>Drones must integrate a tracking system to ensure complete monitoring of drone activity. The resulting information from application location, timing, volumes, products, etc. is integrated in the farm's electronic treatment records, shared with authorities and made publicly available in an open, anonymised manner.</i></p>	This is also a good application practice for traditional spraying, as it is normally included in pesticide labelling.
Article 9c (new)	Not existing.	<p>9c. To protect pollinators, the environment and the contamination of other productions (e.g., beekeeping), when following the principles of pest management when considering the application of a plant protection product, it is recommended to spray at moments when the pollinators are less active.</p> <p><i>Member States are responsible for establishing an effective system to inform and alert neighbouring farmers, beekeepers and citizens.</i></p> <p><i>Specific operator certification for drone spraying is required, as is the case for any other pesticide application.</i></p>	This is especially important for beekeepers, whose bees and beekeeping products could be affected/contaminated by pesticide application.

Exercise of the delegation

1. The power to adopt delegated acts is conferred on the Commission subject to the conditions laid down in this Article.
2. The power to adopt delegated acts referred to in Article 5(3), Article 8(7), Article 14(4) and Article 15(1) shall be conferred on the Commission for a period of five years from 26 July 2019. The Commission shall draw up a report in respect of the delegation of power not later than nine months before the end of the five-year period. The delegation of power shall be tacitly extended for periods of an identical duration, unless the European Parliament or the Council opposes such extension not later than three months before the end of each period.
3. The delegation of power referred to in Article 5(3), Article 8(7), Article 14(4) and Article 15(1) may be revoked at any time by the European Parliament or by the Council. A decision to revoke shall put an end to the delegation of the power specified in that decision. It shall take effect the day following the publication of the decision in the Official Journal of the European Union or at a later date specified therein. It shall not affect the validity of any delegated acts already in force.
4. Before adopting a delegated act, the Commission shall consult experts designated by each Member State in accordance with the principles laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making (6).
5. As soon as it adopts a delegated act, the Commission shall notify it simultaneously to the European Parliament and to the Council.
6. A delegated act adopted pursuant to Article 5(3), Article 8(7), Article 14(4) and Article 15(1) shall enter into force only if no

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