Pollinators and Pesticides

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

In medical research, there is a huge issue with drug companies not publishing inconvenient data. Does the hon. Lady feel that that is a serious problem with neonicotinoids?

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North, Labour)

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that point about commercial confidentiality and the lack of transparency. We hear a lot at the moment about lobbying and related issues, but if the agri-chemical industry wishes to make claims about the value of its products, it must open up the evidence to full scrutiny. There is no case for hiding behind so-called "commercial confidentiality". That prevents the open, transparent and informed policy making that is so badly needed. I agree with the hon. Lady and her point relates to one of the recommendations in our report.

When the weight of peer-reviewed evidence rendered untenable DEFRA's position on the need for unequivocal evidence, it claimed that it would commission the Food and Environment Research Agency to conduct a realistic field study to resolve the matter. That study was not peer reviewed and it was, as one witness to our inquiry presciently pointed out, clearly too small to provide conclusive results. It was undermined by fundamental errors in its execution, such as placing the various hives that were used in the experiments outside on different days of the year.

Our view on the study, which was that we should not accept it, was confirmed by the European Food Safety Authority on Tuesday, when it identified the same weaknesses as we did.

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