

Importing Honey Bees

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This article offers guidance on how to import honey bees into England, Scotland and Wales, along with details of where to find further information to ensure the process is trouble free. In many cases, ensuring that imports comply with the law and are properly documented will reduce the need for an inspector to visit

controls that apply to imports of *Apis mellifera* (honey bees) and *Bombus* spp (bumblebees) from other member states and from countries outside the EU

- The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England and Wales) Order 2006 which lays down the enforcement provisions for the post-import controls that apply to all imports of bees from countries outside the EU

- Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010 which lists the countries outside the EU from which bees may be imported, health certification requirements and the post-import controls
- Commission Decision 2006/855/EC which lays down the health certification requirements and the post-import checks (packaged bees) for bees imported from New Zealand

European Union (EU) Imports

A brief review of the report for 2017 shows that of the 1,776 packages, 1,301 came from Italy. This is of particular interest and requires heightened care because, in 2014, the presence of small hive beetle (SHB), *Aethina tumida*, was confirmed there. Details can be found on the Italian health authority and research organisation for animal health and food safety website at: www.izsvenezie.com/aethina-tumida-in-italy/ Distribution maps on this website show where SHB was found (red and purple crosses) and where inspections were clear (green and purple dots) over the the past three years. Red and green colouration refers to apiaries, purple to sentinel nuclei; dots are negative and crosses are positive indicators for presence of SHB.

With SHB present in Italy since 2014, there is good reason to ensure that all imports arriving in the United Kingdom (UK) come with the proper certification.

Legislation

If you want to import bees from outside of the UK, you will need to comply with the following pieces of legislation:

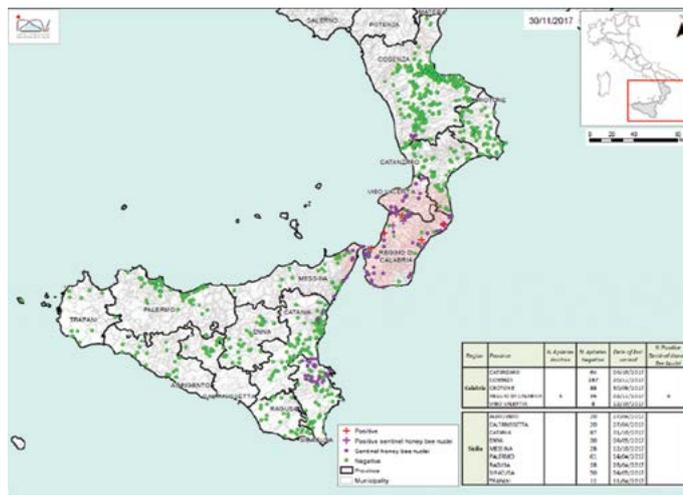
- The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011 (the 'TARP' regulations) which lay down the

European Union (EU) Imports into England, Scotland and Wales

Year	Consignments	Queens	Nuclei	Packages	Colonies
2013	232	8,625	441	2,309	10
2014	235	9,782	580	1,402	10
2015	285	10,434	225	2,393	16
2016	308	13,801	23	1,924	0
2017	319	15,210	19	1,776	0

Further details on these imports can be found on BeeBase on the EU Import report page: www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/BeeDiseases/euImportReport.cfm?year=2014 This shows the breakdown by country and identifies the number of queens, nuclei, packages and colonies making up the consignments. These can vary in size depending upon the number of queens or packages travelling on the same certification.

Distribution map for small hive beetle in Italy and Sicily



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- Council Directive 92/65/EEC (commonly known as the ‘Balai Directive’) which lays down the health certification requirements for bees moving between EU member states.

Imports From Within the European Union

The above pieces of legislation underpin the process of importation and action required when importing or exporting bees. The procedure is relatively simple.

The first step is to notify the National Bee Unit (NBU) (the TARP regulations require the relevant animal health authorities to be notified). To do this, beekeepers must fill in an import notification form which can be found on the ‘Imports and Exports’ pages of BeeBase, along with guidance notes and more information. See: www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?sectionid=47 This should then be emailed, posted or faxed to the NBU office to reach it with as much notice as possible (at least 24 hours before the consignment is due to enter the UK). Alternatively, you can log in to the beekeeper pages of BeeBase and click the ‘Add New Import’ link in the left hand index to enter the information online.

Once this form is submitted, the NBU office will be notified of your intention to import and the expected arrival date of the consignment. These records must be updated if the date or anything else changes, which can be done via your BeeBase login, or by contacting the NBU office direct.

Additionally, consignments must be accompanied by an original health

certificate (photocopies are not acceptable), required under Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010. This should be obtained by the supplier and is issued once the items comprising the consignment have been checked by the relevant veterinary authorities of the exporting country. This health certificate will be needed at each country’s (or region’s) check point, as stated in the Balai Directive. It will confirm that the packages are free from the statutory disease American foul brood (AFB) and the exotic pests small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps*. Without the certificate, there is no guarantee that these checks have been made and consignments should not be allowed to pass through into the next country.

Bees must travel with this official health certificate and it is in your interest to ensure that the supplier (exporter) is providing you with the EU official health certificate, properly processed by the veterinary authorities within the originating member state. The absence of this certificate, or an unofficial certificate, will result in an import being flagged as non-compliant and this will immediately trigger a mandatory check of the consignment by UK bee inspectors. Certificates must have an English language version, in addition to the language of the exporting country. Certificates without an English language version are not acceptable as EU regulations require that certificates are produced in the language of the destination country.

If bees are being driven into the UK from the EU, passing through a port of

entry such as Dover, they may be subject to document spot checks by Border Force working with Animal Health. The absence of, or incorrect, documentation may result in bees (like any other livestock) being seized until the correct documentation is presented. If the correct documentation is not produced and the importer is not able to arrange transport back to where the consignment came from, destruction may occur.

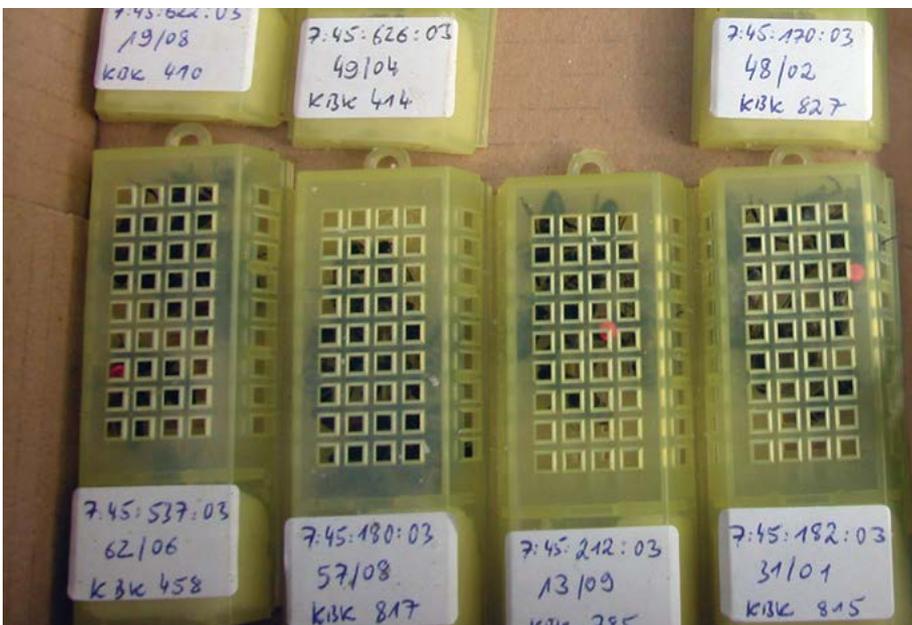
Increasingly, onward travel will not be permitted if documentation is defective or missing and so it is crucial to check that your supplier has provided you with the correct documentation.

The NBU carries out document checks on every import from an EU member state. In most instances, this is a desktop exercise as the records are received via TRACES (the electronic notification system from member states).

Imports from the EU are subject to risk-based post-import inspections after they have arrived at their destination. Currently, the requirements for physical checks on import consignments are:

- an overall 25 per cent of all EU import consignments receive a physical check for compliance
- 50 per cent of all import consignments from Italy receive a physical check (reflecting the increased risk due to presence of SHB)
- 100 per cent of all import consignments originating from Sicily receive a physical check (recognising that this area has previously been found to have SHB)
- any import consignment which is non-compliant due to missing documents, unofficial certificates or gross errors in the documentation giving rise to concern.

A consignment of queens imported from Germany



Imports From Outside the European Union

The term ‘third country’ is used by the European Commission to define any country which is not one of the 28 EU member states. The commodity you wish to import will determine which countries you are allowed to import from, so:

- queens may only be imported from selected third countries, mainly those that list AFB, small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps* as notifiable pests and hence are considered to have appropriate controls in place. We are aware that currently only Argentina, Australia and New Zealand are able



Checking packaged bees and decanting them into hives



to meet these requirements but a detailed list can be found in the Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010

- package bees from outside of the EU may only be imported from New Zealand and must comply with post-import controls. These controls are aimed at reducing the risk of the introduction and spread of exotic bee pests.

Again, when importing from a third country, the process is easy, but there is one difference. As before, you need to notify the NBU at least 24 hours before the package is due to arrive in the UK, but in addition to this you must notify one of the three Border Inspection Posts (BIP) through which your consignment will arrive: Manchester, Heathrow or Gatwick airports. Details of how to do so are in the guidance notes on BeeBase. As stated earlier, failure to acquire a valid

health certificate and import through the proper channels will mean that you are committing an offence under the TARP regulations and, as a result, you could have the bees seized and destroyed or, worse still, you could find yourself responsible for infecting UK colonies with a serious pest or disease.

When you receive a consignment of imported queen honey bees from a third country you must:

- transfer the queens to new (queen) cages before they are introduced to any local colonies
- send the original queen cages, attendant worker bees and other material (all packaging) that accompanied the queen bees from their country of origin to the NBU, within five days of receipt, for examination for the presence of SHB and *Tropilaelaps* mites.

Bee packages from New Zealand are subject to a percentage check (depending on the quantity imported) at the destination apiary and this needs to be discussed and agreed in advance with your local bee inspector.

Final Comments

So, importing bees is neither difficult nor a chore, provided that you are dealing with a reputable supplier that is fully complying with EU regulations. Plan ahead and provide advance notification to the NBU. Better still, discuss your imports in advance with your bee inspector so that should an inspection be necessary, he or she can plan in advance with you how to best do this and attend on the day of arrival, to avoid unnecessary disruption thereafter.

Should you choose to import bees, please make sure you do it responsibly. □

Key Points when Importing

- Plan ahead. Discuss plans with your local bee inspector well in advance so, should an inspection be required, he or she may work with you to avoid potential disruption.
- Ensure your supplier is reputable and that the veterinary authorities in the exporting country issue official EU-recognised health certificates and documentation confirming the proper checks have been made before bees are transported.
- Ensure this documentation travels with the bees and that it is in English.
- Notify the NBU at least 24 hours prior to the consignment arriving in the UK.
- By referring to the percentage of consignments (detailed in the text) that will attract a physical inspection, you can anticipate whether your import is likely to be subject to further checks and can plan accordingly.
- If packages require inspection, the inspector will arrange with you to be present when they are being decanted.
- If queens from the EU require inspection, it is far easier if the inspector can check them while caged, before they are introduced to colonies. In most instances, with preplanning, the inspector can arrange to attend on the day of consignment arrival.
- Queens imported from third countries must have cages, attendant workers and all packaging sent to the NBU within five days of receipt.
- Bee inspectors are always ready to offer guidance.