

## Healthy Bees Plan

### Summary Note of 5th Meeting of the Communications Working Group (CWG)

2 September 2010 – Fera, Sand Hutton, York

Present:

Richard Ball	NBU, Fera	Tim Lovett	BBKA
Mike Brown	Head of NBU, FERA	Gay Marris	NBU, FERA
Rob Chilton	FERA	Liz McIntosh	FERA
Jenna Cook	NBU, FERA	Trish O'Donnell (dial in)	Defra (Strategic Communications Adviser)
Helen Crews	FERA	Carl Reynolds	Chair
Marie Holmes	FERA (Secretary of Group)	Bob Smith	Beekeeper

Apologies: Dan Basterfield - Bee Farmers Association, Sharon Blake - BBKA, Peter Bramwell - Defra Press Office, Amy Byrne - WAG, Brian Clark- WBKA, Robin Dean - Bee Farmer's Association, Claire Waring – BeeCraft, Alison Wilson – Fera.

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

Carl welcomed the Group and gave an overview of the agenda items to be discussed with particular reference to the main part of the meeting which was BeeBase. The discussion on BeeBase would enable the Group to understand its current brief and work towards a consensus, taking into account the NBU's views, on the Group's recommendations for future vision and the brief for one of the key functions of BeeBase i.e., its role as a resource for beekeepers.

#### 2. Presentation on BeeBase

Mike Brown gave a presentation on an overview of BeeBase, before he moved on to show the Group BeeBase and some of its capabilities.

BeeBase was originally created in 1991 in response to the Varroa threat and was designed to be used by NBU staff and inspectors to manage the inspection and surveillance programme. It has 3 key functions listed below in order of priority:

1. To serve the statutory function of the NBU as a core surveillance and management tool
2. Use of the data gathered for research purposes
3. Education and dissemination of advisory information

BeeBase had been further developed and enhanced in early 2010, including the public pages. The Chair asked whether NBU had data on use by the public pre and post the improvements.

**ACTION:** NBU to provide short report to CWG.

Mike showed the Group the public pages before he moved onto the secure area which staff at Fera use. Briefly looked at the differing sections which are restricted to whoever was logged in i.e. an area for Scotland, Wales, Defra etc and pointed out some of the numerous searches such as; apiaries under standstill, RAS, Bee Inspector stats and beekeepers by county. Access is restricted with various hierarchical levels in Fera where only a super user can see everything on BeeBase. Office staff, laboratory staff, SBI's and RBI's can only see data specific to them and their work areas.

The Group were shown an inspectors log and the colour coding system used to identify priority inspections in the known risk areas. This illustrated how inspections were prioritised and managed

Mike also updated the Group that files relating to beekeepers who were no longer active were removed so not to inaccurately elevate figures. The data was stored but not active and some 17,000 records have been removed to date. Mike also pointed out that BeeBase had been used for research projects outside of Fera. Universities and other research institutes have approached NBU for data which there is almost 20 years worth of. These data were valuable for bee research. Whenever Fera was approached for data, contractual arrangements and agreements would be put in place and data protection upheld. The researchers were given extracted information (personal data removed) and strict controls placed on how it could be used.

### 3. Feedback and discussion on BeeBase

The group discussed how we engage further with beekeepers through BeeBase, where the following observations/suggestions were made:

- It was suggested a way in which we could engage with those beekeepers who weren't already registered could be through appealing to the notion of how data about the health of their apiaries (anonymous of course) would aid research into honeybees and therefore be of benefit to them and the beekeeping community at large. We needed to enhance beekeepers perceptions of value in BeeBase whilst emphasising that personal data was protected and not shared outside NBU. The Group agreed this was a good angle and should be explored further in developing key messages about BeeBase directed at stakeholders.
- Richard Ball noted that a common misconception amongst a number of new beekeepers was when they have joined their local association they assumed that they were also joining BeeBase. Rob Chilton suggested as a counter measure that the tick box of opting in/out of BeeBase, which many local associations were now doing, should carry a positive message about benefits of BeeBase to dissuade opt out.
- Tim Lovett suggested a letter campaign to find those whose email address we didn't know, as BeeBase only had email addresses for half of those registered. Rob Chilton and Trish O'Donnell said that this would be likely to fall under the current marketing freeze and an exemption case would be required to be submitted whilst being mindful not to take the total exemption

case over £25k (as per Defra guidance). Another approach could be to contact those registered on BeeBase and requesting that they send their email address to the NBU, by placing a letter through bee magazines and local associations which would be zero cost. Mike added that BeeBase was ready for mailshots should the need arise (subject to marketing freeze rules and budget limits).

- Tim suggested that a useful exercise would be a data exchange between the NBU and BBKA, on numbers only, of those who were registered on BeeBase but not members of an association and vice versa to gather a better picture of potential numbers of beekeepers. The Chair asked whether there was a specific number or percentage of beekeepers which should be registered as essential for reducing the incidence of statutory disease.

**ACTION:** Marie to explore with NBU the feasibility (practical and data protection aspects) of undertaking a swop of databases e.g., through a third party, to get a better understanding of total numbers of beekeepers to report back to next CWG. The NBU would also prepare advice for the next CWG on the Chairs question about the number or percentage of beekeepers we should know as essential for effective management of disease.

The group also discussed the following further ideas about BeeBase development, in addition to those outlined in paper CWG 5/2:

- Tim suggested as a quick fix to change the picture on the BeeBase homepage daily, this would not only make the pages less static but also reward repeat access. Mike offered to select 24 photos already available on BeeBase and would check with the technical team whether that would be possible but stressed that other BeeBase jobs (on current list) would have to be realigned.

**ACTION:** Mike to arrange update of BeeBase homepage with sequence of daily changing pictures.

- The Group looked at the register online page and acknowledged that it could be improved. Gay suggested a postcode map of a users area to pop up at that point to encourage them to carry on and register.
- Liz McIntosh suggested that when beekeepers log onto their own records they see straight away whether or not they are in a high risk area (disease) and if so, what steps they could take to minimise risks to their bees.
- Bob Smith pointed out that as a user he noticed there was little benefit in registering in the context of what was available on BeeBase. This was because what was there in the secure area was of limited value that wasn't already on the public pages, and that we should be pointing out registration will tell them about disease threats straight to their inbox, which is something the NBU were developing as a routine function of BeeBase.
- Tim suggested that BeeBase should include an explanation of the hierarchy of access to personal data i.e., there is limited access by NBU staff and limited super users.

- Tim thought in light of today's meeting and the around the table agreement about appealing to beekeepers to register for research purposes, that it would be worth adding a line to the letter which would be appearing in October's BBKA News from Helen Crews encouraging registration on BeeBase.

**ACTION:** Marie to add a line and enquire with editor whether this is viable as deadline for submissions had past.

Much work has already been completed on BeeBase and many enhancements made. The NBU had numerous further ideas and a desire to improve BeeBase even further as a comprehensive resource for beekeepers as there was no deficit of content or ideas, but there was of resource. An integral part of these future improvements would be to employ a band 5 member of staff as a web editor to concentrate fully on BeeBase, as at present there wasn't such a person who could take full ownership as the NBU staff were very stretched and couldn't afford any more time to work on BeeBase than they already did around the day job. It was suggested that if this extra resource were employed that they could work through the list of suggestions already made, improve on any quick fixes that had been implemented and to implement the ideas the NBU would like to do but not had the resource such as newsletters, notes on what to do at certain times of the year, top tips and many others.

**ACTION:** Liz and Marie to draft a brief on CWG's proposals for future enhancements for the public pages of BeeBase for circulation to CWG, as a draft. Once agreed by CWG (during early September) Liz would present to PMB on 21/09/2010 as CWG's recommendations on future of BeeBase public pages.

**ACTION:** Liz McIntosh to include in the business case for the next 2-3 years of Healthy Bees Implementation, the proposal for web editor resource.

#### 4. Update on business case progress

Liz provided an update on the business case for the next 2-3 years of Healthy Bees where the aim is to produce a draft case by end of September. This would then be for Defra to consider whether or when to submit for approval for future funding. The previous drafts of the proposals for future funding had been circulated amongst the working groups during August. CWG would also see future drafts.

#### 5. Review of 4 NBU best practice templates

Liz introduced the topic of the 4 NBU best practice templates which Ian Homer had written. The Group agreed to look at the style, tone and presentation rather than the detail of the content which would be left to the NBU and HEG. Rob Chilton and Bob suggested the Group focused on one template and it was decided that the template entitled 'Handling and examining a colony of bees' was the best to focus on. Rob would work on the layout and presentation of this template and put it into a Fera format, including photos and will circulate to CWG for comment.

**ACTION:** Rob to design a template layout.

**ACTION:** All – any substantive comments to Rob on layout ideas.

## 6. Update on progress of planning matrix

Rob introduced the topic of the comms matrix and invited the Group to take it away and look at the segments identified (are they the most appropriate breakdown of our audiences). The Group agreed the importance to identify and prioritise and prioritise them in order of importance for comms activities. Rob noted there were a number of surveys ongoing and enquired whether there would be other ways of disseminating the information which hadn't already been explored. Alison Wilson the Fera Press Officer, was also actively seeking out good new stories and was pro-active in awareness raising of honey bee health and the Healthy Bees Plan itself.

**ACTION:** All - identify whether current groups identified are correct and prioritise. Comments to Rob by 13 September.

## 7. Upcoming events/activities

Tim updated the Group with the BBKA's adopt a beehive scheme. To date there were 4500 members of the scheme which is aimed at funding further research and the course in a case initiative. BBKA have also been working with New Holland and attended a fruit focus event at Hampton Court. Tim invited the NBU to fill a plenary slot at the next spring convention which could be dedicated to BeeBase

Bob updated the group with the Medway beekeepers activities and in September he would be attending a meeting at an RSPB reserve, attending a ploughing match and the Medway beekeepers convention, in addition to looking for further opportunities to promote BeeBase and the NBU's work and took copies of the Beekeeping Essentials leaflet for distribution at these events.

Liz updated the Group with the news of a visit from the National Trust which was a success. Eleven beekeepers/gardeners attend a session at Fera which involved a tour of the apiary and labs in addition to talks relating to bees. Good future links were forged and there would be follow up visits either to Fera and/or at the National Trusts AGM. In addition, Fera were aware that the Mayor of London was funding a new initiative via Sustain (charity) to set up 50 beehives across London

## 8. Round up

Marie handed out an observational document on an exercise of blog monitoring. Marie conducted a one week trial of half an hour per day looking at blogs and observed the following to be the most popular topics on several forums:

- Beginners questions
- Intermediate and advanced questions (worth noting less so than beginners)
- Pests and diseases e.g. Varroa – when and how to treat, SHB – how will it be dealt with
- Equipment and hardware e.g. what hives are best and equipment sterilisation
- Photo galleries (very popular)
- Environmental issues e.g. – farmers spraying fields near bees

The aim of this exercise was to ascertain what was being discussed in the beekeeping world by those on the ground and to use that information to tailor FAQ's

or topical newsletters etc. on what was being discussed for posting on BeeBase (and also to be covered on BBKA website or bee press). The Group agreed that it was helpful to keep up to date on current items being discussed.

**ACTION:** the Chair invited Marie to undertake a tour of the various beekeeping blogs and sites as a routine just before each CWG meeting (e.g. 1-2 weeks before) to identify current issues. CWG would review and consider how best to deal with emerging issues and concerns, through updates on BeeBase and association sites/newsletters.

#### 9. AOB and date of next meeting

Bob enquired about progress with Fera's contingency plans on SHB and Asian hornet. The SHB plan was close to publishing and there would be a short leaflet created to publicise that. The Asian hornet risk assessment was in progress. The Group would also like to see the workplans of HEG and SEAG.

Next meeting is due to be held in London in early December.

**ACTION:** Marie to circulate workplans to CWG, and to send Doodle poll to Group with December date selection.

Healthy Bees Project Team  
Fera  
6 September 2010