

**Minutes of the Healthy Bees Plan
Project Management Board
14th Meeting, 18th July 2011
Room 301, Ergon House, Defra, London**

Present:

Helen Crews	Food & Environment Research Agency [Fera] (Chair)
Liz McIntosh	Food & Environment Research Agency (Project Manager)
Helen Carter	Food & Environment Research Agency (Secretary)
Giles Budge	Food & Environment Research Agency
Brian Ripley	British Beekeepers' Association [BBKA]
Tim Lovett	British Beekeepers' Association
Dinah Sweet	Welsh Beekeepers' Association [WBKA]
Mark Tatchell	Chair of SEAG
John Howat	Bee Farmers' Association
Wally Shaw	Welsh Beekeepers' Association
Martha Spagnuolo-Weaver	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)

Apologies:

Steve Sunderland	Scottish Executive
Huw Jones	Welsh Assembly Government [WAG]
Martin Smith	British Beekeepers' Association
Carl Reynolds	Chair of CWG
Andy Wattam	Food & Environment Research Agency
Bob Smith	Amateur Beekeeper

1. Welcome and introduction

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 14th meeting of the Healthy Bees Plan Project Management Board. Giles Budge (Fera) had agreed to attend the meeting instead of Andy Wattam (Fera).

2. Presentation by VMD on medicines action plan

One of the priorities of the Healthy Bees Plan was to increase the availability of authorised medicines for bees and to ensure their appropriate use. Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), an Executive Agency of Defra were leading on this work and have developed an action plan on measures aimed at improving the availability of medicines. Martha Spagnuolo-Weaver (VMD) attended the meeting to update the Board on progress with the action plan and current issues.

Legislation

Martha said that honey bees were considered a food-producing species in the EU – Regulation 470/2009 - *food producing animals are defined as animals bred, raised, kept, slaughtered or harvested for the purpose of producing food*. The Board had a brief discussion about the status of bees in relation to veterinary medicines legislation and noted VMD's view that this definition was unlikely to change for honey bees and hence medicines legislation applied to this species in the same way as to other livestock. The EU and UK legislation applying to bees can be found at: www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/vet/vmr_legislation.aspx

Availability of Medicines – update on VMD action plan

The VMD action plan was established in 2009 and provided a pragmatic approach to increasing the availability of authorised medicines, where the over-riding imperative was to maintain food safety. The current version of the action plan on the VMD website was being updated. Martha stressed that an holistic approach was necessary for maintaining healthy bees, including good husbandry. The VMD would be working with the Healthy Bees Communications working Group to develop a communications campaign on bee medicines.

Recent developments on Fumidil. Apart from in the UK, this product was not marketed in the EU. However, the company which currently marketed this product in the UK had decided to stop selling it. As a result, from 31st December 2011, the UK would have 6 months to sell stocks and then it would be removed from the market. Tim Lovett (BBKA) was concerned that this might result in panic buying. However, John Howat (BFA) thought that Fumidil was not extensively used by bee farmers to treat Nosema and Brian Ripley (BBKA) said that Thymol was reported as an alternative. Good husbandry practices also helped to manage Nosema. Mark Tatchell (SEAG) asked whether there was any scope for producing medicines for minor species. Martha Spagnuolo Weaver (VMD) said that she would discuss with the Chemicals and Regulations Directorate (CRD) whether there were lessons learned from work lead by the Horticulture Development Council in the development of plant protection products for minor use crops.

Further information regarding authorised medicines for bees can be found at: www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/Default.aspx

Suitably Qualified Persons (SQPs)

All bee medicines in the UK are currently classified as “over the counter”. EU law (Commission Directive 2006/130/EC) requires that medicines for food producing animals should be available on prescription. The UK needed therefore to work towards providing authorised medicines by prescription. There were two options available to the UK:

- *POM – V classification* - prescription by vets and supply by vets or pharmacists.
- *POM – VPS classification* - prescription by vets, pharmacists or Suitably Qualified Persons (SQP) and supply by these professionals.

The VMD was working towards the POM –VPS approach for bee medicines and as a result was developing a project to (i) reclassify bee medicines as POM – VPS and (ii) ensure that a sufficient number of SQPs was in place to prescribe the medicines. As part of this project, the VMD had been working with the BBKA and the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority to develop a training programme for SQPs to allow suitably trained people to prescribe and supply medicines. Martha Spagnuolo-Weaver (VMD) agreed to attend the autumn PMB meeting to report on progress with this work.

ACTIONS: 1. Martha Spagnuolo Weaver (VMD) to discuss with Chemicals and Regulations Directorate (CRD) whether there are any lessons or ideas for producing medicines for minor species from work led by the Horticulture Development Council in the development of plant protection products for minor use crops. 2. Martha Spagnuolo Weaver (VMD) to attend the autumn PMB meeting to report on progress regarding SQPs and the reclassification of bee medicines.

3. Presentation by NBU on available results from RAS; plans to communicate results to beekeepers

Giles Budge (Fera) attended the meeting to update the Board on the Random Apiary Survey (RAS), the results of which would be available at the end of July 2011 (first set) and at the end of October (second set). The primary role of the RAS was to monitor the prevalence of statutory notifiable disease (AFB and EFB), data which were collected at the point of inspection. The study required that 4,600 were visited across England and Wales over two complete seasons between 1/6/09 and 31/5/11; this equated to 10% of beekeepers who were registered on BeeBase (total of 25,965 apiary sites). The updated figures of apiaries inspected was as follows:

Year 1	Year 2	
6,799	6,186	prioritised
2,369	2,400	random

Provisional estimates of the number of apiaries affected by notifiable disease across England and Wales suggested that, in the absence of a prioritised inspection programme, AFB had a prevalence of 0.24% (62 apiaries) and EFB had a prevalence of 1.12% (290 apiaries). This contrasted sharply with similar estimates generated using prioritised inspections data, when apparent prevalence for both AFB and EFB was far higher at 0.76% (196 apiaries) and 4.97% (1290 apiaries) respectively.

Giles went on to say that every apiary in BeeBase is given a red, amber or green status based on spatial and temporal links to disease outbreaks and known exotic risk points. As expected, EFB was mainly found in the red/amber apiaries but, unexpectedly, the majority of AFB cases were found in the areas which had a green status.

The provisional report on the inspectorate's data was available at the end of July and the final report was due to be submitted to the customer, Bee Health Policy, at the end of October 2011.

The National Bee Unit's current plans to provide the results to the bee community in the following ways were as follows (note: to be confirmed):

	Proposed Timescale
BeeBase	As soon as possible
Apimondia	September 2011
Article peer review	November 2011
Beecraft	November 2011
Welsh Beekeeper	November 2011
WBKA Spring Convention	April 2012
BBKA Spring Convention	April 2012

Brian Ripley (BBKA) and Tim Lovett (BBKA) were keen that the results appeared in the BBKA News. Giles agreed that we should encourage publications to have the article and the Chair agreed saying that they would need to share the copy i.e. a separate copy for each magazine would not be prepared. The Board agreed with this and the Project Manager said that she would discuss the distribution of the results at the next Communications Working Group. Giles agreed to draft a report on the RAS results for the beekeeping press to share.

John Howat (BFA) said that he was aware that beekeepers individual results were already available on BeeBase, although they may not be aware of this. Giles agreed to send an email out to registered Beekeepers to notify them that their results were available.

ACTION: 1. Project Manager to consider the distribution of the RAS results at the next CWG meeting. 2. Giles Budge (Fera) to draft a report on the RAS results for the beekeeping press to share. 3. Giles Budge (Fera) to notify registered beekeepers that their RAS results were available on BeeBase.

4. Policy review – terms of reference, timeline. Beekeeper reps on review team

The Project Manger said that the Honey Bee Health Policy Review would inform the future direction for bee health policy and delivery in England and Wales with a particular focus on the government's future response to pest and disease risks. The main driver for the review was Defra's response to the National Audit Office (NAO) 2008 investigation on bee health which was prompted by growing concerns about the health threats and challenges facing bees and beekeeping. Additional funding had been provided by Defra for the RAS on the basis that the results would be used to review the disease control programme.

To help Fera with this work, they had convened a review team who would provide advice over the coming months. Decision making would rest with Fera. The first

meeting of the review team was due to take place on 21st July 2011 and membership currently consisted of the following:

Tony Harrington (Fera) - SRO
Richard Watkins (Fera) – Chair
Liz McIntosh (Fera) – representing Fera Policy
Representative from the Welsh Assembly Government
Representative from the National Bee Unit (for scientific advice and input)
David Aston (BBKA) for technical input
Steve Thomas (WBKA)
David Bancalari (BFA)
Prof Rob Smith (Huddersfield University) – independent scientist
Economist (Fera)
Les Eckford (WAG) – veterinary perspective

In addition to the above it was intended that the Board and SEAG would have input.

Tim Lovett (BBKA) was concerned that there were a number of non-beekeepers on the group. In addition, he felt that HEG and CWG should either have representatives on the group or at least have input into the group. The Project Manager said that membership may be widened part way through the review to consider emerging conclusions and recommendations.

Brian Ripley (BBKA) was concerned that the review team did not report to the PMB. The Chair said that it had initially been intended that the two groups would run in parallel but, following concerns expressed by the Board, she agreed that the Board needed more input into the policy review. However, the Chair clarified that any final decisions regarding Honey Bee Health Policy were ultimately the responsibility of Ministers and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Policy Review Team were discussing AFB on 21st July and the Project Management Board had been provided with a paper PMB 14/1 concerning the future of AFB policy. The Project Manager agreed to circulate the Board's views on the paper to the Policy Review Team in advance of their meeting.

The Project Manager also agreed to circulate the Terms of Reference and timeline for the policy review to the Board.

ACTION: 1. Project Manager to circulate the PMB's input and views on the future of AFB policy to the Policy Review Team. 2. Project Manager to circulate the draft Terms of Reference and timeline for the policy review to the Board.

4.a Draft AFB working paper for the review (PMB 14/1) – part 2 and part 3. Two breakout groups to consider what we want to achieve on AFB.

The Project Manager introduced this paper and item as an opportunity for PMB to provide input to the policy review. She would gather their view at this session and share them with the policy review team as well as sending a copy of the comments to PMB.

Input and Views on Part 1 of the paper

Comments on data - should we be considering percentages or absolute cases? Are we comparing like with like in looking at percentages in recent years? Are the current detection rates close to the total number of cases, if so, the change from 1952/54 levels is remarkable. Over that period, have there been significant changes in policy for AFB? Has destruction always been the "treatment"?

The Random Apiary Survey will help answer whether the current inspection protocol is picking up a number of cases approaching the absolute number or would we see twice as many cases if we examined twice as many colonies?

How many hot spots are there? 4 or 5 cases in a county could be a tight cluster or scattered more randomly? If disease hot spots have been identified (other than around honey packing plants), what steps have been taken to investigate these?

Policy aims - aiming to eradicate AFB seems an unrealistic goal if the UK goes it alone. The random nature of AFB suggests random exposure to the infective spores and the obvious potential source of those is in foreign honey. All the time we import honey from countries where AFB is endemic (but maybe suppressed by antibiotics), we must expect bees occasionally to access this honey and to contract AFB.

Effectiveness and impacts of current controls - "current low levels" are slightly elevated again this year, 40 cases in England & Wales at 11/7/11. As the paper says, this suggests current controls are working well.

Costs of controls - we need to balance this with the idea of costs of doing nothing. If surveillance was stopped (eg Scotland/Jersey) and AFB became established - what would then be the cost of recovering the situation? The costs of AFB in countries such as USA, where antibiotics are used prophylactically and resistant strains are emerging, needs to a part of this equation.

Input and Views on Part 2 of the paper

Question 1 - are we succeeding to achieve our policy aims? The following points were made:

- Prevention and control are reasonable aims, but eradication is not due to continuing imports of honey from countries with AFB (ie, expect bees to have occasional access to imported honey potentially leading to infection).

- The resources and effort to eradicate AFB would be huge and not guaranteed to be successful due to honey imports. Undesirable to go for eradication as disproportionate to the benefits.
- Do we know enough about the biology to control AFB? Mixed views. The fact that our controls are working and disease levels are low would suggest that we do understand the biology well enough – if we didn't, then our controls would not be as effective.
- Should we focus on disease hot-spots?
 - are there hotspots other than around a limited number of honey packers?
 - What proportion of the total cases are within "hotspots"?
 - Have the reasons for other hotspots been investigated?
 - Would a trial at one hotspot site be fruitful to find out if additional steps would help reduce disease/recurrence?
 - Can we distinguish between outbreaks due to imported AFB vs endemic AFB sources?

Question 2 –are current controls enough? The following points were made:

- Negligible levels of AFB would suggest that the controls are working well and no need to do more.
- If we're not aiming for eradication, could we do less? What is an acceptable level of infection and what are the most efficient means of achieving this? Could we live with higher levels than we currently have – say a 10 fold increase from current levels of 0.1 – 0.2% to 1 to 2%?
- Would make sense to undertake an analysis of risk point and identify proportionate controls depending on level of risk and cost/benefits (eg HACCP or formal risk assessment) – this would help develop ideas on whether there are any new controls to be considered.
- Need to have increased inspections/follow up on imports given evidence such as in 2008 that AFB (and EFB) was found on imported combs.
- Voluntary code of practice implemented by honey packers to reduce risk of visits by bees and potential infections locally – do we know which imported honeys do carry AFB spores so that honey packers pay particular attention to stop access by local bees?
- What do we know about cross-infectivity within apiaries – influence of beekeeping practices on AFB occurrence?

Question 3 – what are the key mitigating factors that currently control or prevent AFB? The following were suggested:

- On confirmation of disease, destruction of colony and equipment by burning (and standstill on rest of apiary).

- Sterilisation by flame of equipment on the apiary (ies) which might be harbouring spores. Could design of equipment be improved to reduce risk of spores being retained?
- Regular comb changes.
- Beekeeper awareness and skills to identify disease and report it on suspicion.
- All potentially affected beekeepers to be informed of local outbreaks to identify any further cases and reduce risk of spread.

Question 4 – what is stopping us eradicating AFB?

- See points above – imports of honey containing spores leading to potential outbreaks due to robbing by bees.

Question 5 –what are the benefits of controls? What would happen if we stopped controlling AFB? The following were suggested:

- Without controls, (hobby) bee keepers would give up over time, as uncontrolled AFB would lead to poor outcomes for the colony.
- Commercial beekeepers would destroy affected hives and sterilise equipment.
- Cost of disease to beekeeper – about £100-£600 per colony due to replacement costs of new queen/bees and if he/she has to purchase a new hive/box, plus consequential losses of honey in that season [data from case studies in Scotland and Jersey?]

Question 6 – emerging trends or risk factors that could increase level of infection in England and Wales in next 5-10 years? Suggestions were as follows:

- Natural beekeeping practices could increase risks, as difficult to see what's happening to the brood;
- Possible increase in imported honey from many countries due to internet sales.

Input and Views on Part 3 of the paper

Option 1 – tighter controls on movements. Unless movement is the cause of a large proportion of AFB cases, the impact is likely to be low.

Option 2 – high risk zones. Dependent on the significance of hotspots in the overall picture, could be something to trial?

Option 3 – protected zones. As imported honey is at the root of most random cases, this option is unlikely to be needed or work.

Option 4 – controls on imports. Is there evidence of a causal link? The table on p8 tends to understate the imports situation e.g. the 97 "total number of imports" for

2007, equates to 97 consignments, from 8 EU countries, representing 7741 queens. Additionally there were 2808 queens from Hawaii and NZ, of which 49 were examined. However, as it says in the "impact" box, the impact of imports on AFB looks low.

Option 5 – voluntary controls on honey packers. In hand.

Option 6 – compulsory registration. Mixed views. Suggest a weak case for compulsory registration, on account of AFB. Far stronger cases can be made for other risks, e.g. Small Hive Beetle. Compulsory registration would make beekeepers disappear to avoid another layer of officialdom.

Option 7 - ensure best practice is impractical. We can promote and encourage but there is no place for legislation here.

Option 8 - colony/apiary approach - apiary approach to AFB controls would be over the top. One colony in an apiary infected, the whole lot destroyed, that would certainly not go down well with beekeepers or bee farmers, there would be a strong dis-incentive to voluntary registration, driving beekeepers and apiary locations "underground". The recurrence rates in following season do not support this notion - clear-up rates are good.

5. Asian Hornet Update

In the United Kingdom Asian Hornet is a non-native species but is not a notifiable pest of honey bees. As a result, Fera has no powers to deal with this species as a pest of honey bees. Fera is liaising with the non-native species team in Bristol to decide how, if at all, the government needs to respond to Asian Hornets. It was likely that any action would take the form of information and advice.

ACTION: Project Manager to update the PMB on the emerging policy on Asian Hornet when available.

6. Sign off notes of 12th and 13th meetings for posting on BeeBase. July Highlight report. Risks and Issues log (PMB 14/2)

Notes of 12th and 13th meetings

The minutes of the 12th and 13th meeting were signed off by the Board and would now be posted onto BeeBase.

Highlight report

It was agreed that Risk 7 – range of authorised medicines needed to stay on 'red'.

ACTION: Secretary to arrange for 12th and 13th minutes to be posted on BeeBase.

7. Workplan for Phase 2 – review of progress with implementing activities in plan (PMB 14/3)

PMB 14/3 brought together the workplans for the three working groups and showed progress against dates until July 2011. The following items which had a RAG status of 'red' were discussed:

3.1. Set up contract with BBKA co-ordinator (Bill Cadmore). The Project Manager agreed that she would arrange the contract for £5k which was to co-fund the BBKA education coordinator role.

6.2. AMTRA to circulate draft SQP course to Fera. The Board agreed that this remained on 'red'.

6.3. Hold meeting with VMD on SQPs to review progress. It was agreed that Martha Spagnuolo-Weaver (VMD) attended the autumn PMB meeting to report on progress.

6.4. Invite medicines producers to PMB meeting. The Board agreed that the Chair wrote to medicines manufacturers to inform them of the Healthy Bees Plan and the PMB's interest in the availability of authorised treatments.

8. BeeBase to become the authoritative source of advice for beekeepers. This was discussed later in the meeting (agenda item 9).

13. Secure additional funding for HBP education and research through sponsors. This was currently delayed due to the Project Manager's other priorities and would now be completed in Quarter 4.

Mark Thatchell (SEAG) suggested that co-funding may be available via agri-chemicals companies and the Project Manager agreed to consider this.

ACTIONS: 1. Project Manager to arrange a £10k contract to co-fund the BBKA education co-ordinator role. 2. Chair to write to medicines manufacturers to inform them of Healthy Bees Plan and PMB's interest in the availability of authorised treatments. 3. Project Manager to amend PMB 14/3 to consider funding opportunities through sponsors (item 13) in Quarter 4.

8. Update on contract with BBKA and NDB on education project including plans to embed new materials/courses into local associations training programmes during 2011/12 (PMB 14/4 and PMB 14/5)

Robert Smith had provided a paper titled 'Delivery of the NDB Short Course Programme, Apr – Jun 2011'. The following was planned:

- Following successful delivery of 14 short courses some additional titles had been added, some of which were to be offered in the coming months.
- Training was to be consolidated into three main Regional Training Centres
- 3 short courses were run this quarter, 10 short courses were about to be advertised and 10 are planned for early next year.

The Chair thanked Martin Smith (BBKA) for his paper 'Delivering Education Report' (PMB 14/5) which came out of the Delivering Education Group which aimed to improve education delivery at a local level. Martin updated the Board on courses which had taken place over the summer and also what was planned over the winter, as follows:

- Reinforcing the use of the white and yellow CiCs
- Introducing red and green CiCs
- How to set up local/regional training schemes for module study
- How the NDB courses can fit within regional and local training.

The Chair invited comments from the Board on each of the papers.

Tim Lovett (BBKA) said that concern had been expressed by the BBKA Trustees at the number of different Boards/Committees which were now involved in delivering education. Brian Ripley (BBKA) said that Chris Deaves (BBKA) was currently considering how each of the areas: delivery of education, CiC, husbandry and the examination process, could be brought together into a single entity and would report to the trustees in November.

It was also noted that Martin Smith (BBKA) and Chris Deaves (BBKA) ended their time as Trustees at the end of this year.

Mark Tatchell (SEAG) thought that an indicator was needed as to the core level of competence which a beekeeper should have. The number of beekeepers achieving the basic level of competence would help us to assess the progress of HBP implementation. The Board agreed with this view and Mark said that he would take this forward with Chris Deaves (BBKA).

ACTION: Mark Tatchell (SEAG) to discuss with Chris Deaves (BBKA) how best to capture the number of beekeepers achieving the basic level of competence, as an indicator of progress for HBP implementation.

9. BeeBase coordinator – progress with recruitment; implications for budget

The Chair reminded the Board that, during 2011/12, there was £50k available for the BeeBase coordinator post and £10k for the technical development of BeeBase. With regard to recruitment, any internal (civil servant) candidates could be recruited without seeking approval from the Secretary of State but any external recruitment would require approval.

The Board still felt that BeeBase was a priority and they agreed that the recruitment should go ahead, on the basis of either 1 full-time member of staff or 2 part-time, preferably with a beekeeping/media/communications background.

The Chair said that a potential suitable candidate had expressed an interest in the post and it was agreed that she should circulate the job description and the candidate's CV to the Board (and CWG) for their consideration.

Giles Budge (Fera) suggested that the £10k for technical development could go out to tender to companies who specialise in designing up websites. John Howat (BFA) thought that BeeBase needed to be prioritised and that any money not used for the coordinator post could be put towards making it a 'sponsored link'.

ACTION: Chair to circulate the job description for BeeBase coordinator and CV of a possible candidate to the PMB and CWG.

10. (delays to) Plans to secure additional funding/sponsorship to support education and research in phase 2

This was discussed earlier (agenda item 7).

11. AOB and date of next meeting

The next meeting was planned for mid-September 2011. Giles Budge (Fera) to attend to update the Board on the RAS results. Martha Spagnuolo Weaver (VMD) to attend to report on progress regarding SQPs (at the December meeting of PMB) .

Fera
September 2011