

**Final Minutes of the Healthy Bees Plan  
Project Management Board  
15<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011  
Room LG01, Ergon House, Defra, London**

**Present:**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Helen Crews      | Food & Environment Research Agency [Fera] (Chair)    |
| Liz McIntosh     | Food & Environment Research Agency (Project Manager) |
| Marie Holmes     | Food & Environment Research Agency (Secretary)       |
| Giles Budge      | Food & Environment Research Agency (via telephone)   |
| Brian Ripley     | British Beekeepers' Association [BBKA]               |
| Tim Lovett       | British Beekeepers' Association                      |
| Dinah Sweet      | Welsh Beekeepers' Association [WBKA]                 |
| Wally Shaw       | Welsh Beekeepers' Association                        |
| Mark Tatchell    | Chair of SEAG  |
| Robin Lewis      | Bee Farmers' Association [BFA]                       |
| Murray McGregor  | Bee Farmers' Association                             |
| Bob Smith        | Amateur Beekeeper                                    |
| Carl Reynolds    | Chair of CWG   |
| Steve Sunderland | Scottish Executive (via telephone)                   |
| Amy Byrne        | Welsh assembly Government (via telephone)            |

**Apologies:**

|              |                                    |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Huw Jones    | Welsh Assembly Government [WAG]    |
| Martin Smith | British Beekeepers' Association    |
| Andy Wattam  | Food & Environment Research Agency |

**1. Welcome and introduction**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Healthy Bees Plan Project Management Board and welcomed new members Robin Lewis and Murray McGregor who were representing the Bee Farmers' Association. The Chair notified the Board of the new Minister for Defra, Lord John Taylor of Holbeach. Thanks were extended to John Home for his time spent on the Board.

**2. Update on RAS results (PR2/1)**

Giles Budge (Fera) provided an update on the Random Apiary Survey (RAS). The RAS was Commissioned by Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Defra and was a two year surveillance exercise to provide an accurate estimate of the prevalence of honey bee pests and diseases. The field sampling had been completed, and samples and results were being

processed and analysed. The paper PR 2/1 presented results from visual inspections. The molecular (sub-clinical) data would be available in October/November. As this was still work in progress, PMB were invited to identify any new questions/issues which could be drawn out from the data.

High level findings included:

- The prevalence of American (AFB) and European (EFB) foulbrood across England and Wales was 24-27 cases and 110-122 cases per 10,000 apiaries respectively
- The priority inspection programme detected more AFB and EFB than the random inspection programme
- Follow-up risk-based inspections accounted for up to 7% of the total AFB found, and up to 14% of the total EFB found within the entire priority inspection programme
- Larger apiaries were at greater risk of having AFB or EFB
- Apiaries with shared ownership were more likely to have EFB than apiaries owned by an individual beekeeper
- Apiaries owned by professional beekeepers were more likely to have EFB than those owned by amateur beekeepers
- Current apiary risk classifications (high, medium and low) are useful for targeting disease

Overall, AFB and EFB had usually been found in areas which we expected to find them (ie, similar to areas identified by priority inspection programme), indicating that the current priority inspection programme detected more disease than if apiaries were visited at random.

The following points were raised in discussion:

Carl Reynolds (CWG) suggested that the data indicated that amateur beekeepers were less likely to have disease than professional beekeepers, and asked whether this was simply an issue of scale, or was there something more complex at play. He also asked whether, in communicating the results to beekeepers, it would make sense to spell out advice about sharing apiaries (such as, if more than x (maybe 2) beekeepers share an apiary, they are more likely to have foulbrood). In response, Giles indicated that this could be looked at but it would not be that easy.

Tim Lovett (BBKA) asked whether RAS was looking at a wider range of pathogens, given that results reported so far had been on AFB and EFB. Giles confirmed that other pathogens and molecular data were being included in the analysis and would be reported in due course. The paper provided (PR 2/1) was a provisional summary document. Tim suggested that when the results were communicated, Fera should spell out which pests and pathogens were covered.

Mark Tatchell (SEAG) asked whether the EFB results for amateur beekeepers could be presented separately to those from bee farmers to tease out whether differences in number of colonies managed impacted on disease levels. He observed that there was lots of useful information emerging from the RAS that would help the policy review identify how to improve the cost effectiveness of inspection programme.

## Communicating the RAS results to beekeepers - comms plan

Giles reported that elements from the summary note would be used to draft an article for Bee Craft who were publishing an introductory article on the RAS in November and WBKA News who were publishing in December. BBKA News were scheduled to run a more complete article at a later date when the other pathogens and molecular biology were available. However, Tim felt that it was important to get something into BBKA News now on the provisional findings. It was agreed that if they were to run something that it would be to simply flag up that a more detailed article in a future edition would follow. Bob Smith requested that CWG should see the draft article which would be written by Gay Marris (Fera) before it was submitted to Bee Craft and WBKA News.

Individual results would be available on BeeBase to those whose apiaries had been surveyed in the study. Giles was also drafting an article for submission to a scientific journal in November. Giles was scheduled to present the results at WBKA & BBKA spring conventions in 2012.

**ACTIONS: 1. Gay Marris to work with Sharon Blake/Tim Lovett to develop a short piece for BBKA News. 2. Gay Marris to circulate draft article for Bee Craft and WBKA News to CWG. 3. Gay Marris to check with Scotland's beekeeping press (Stephen Sunderland) whether they would like an article on RAS and the results.**

### **3. Policy review – update on progress including outcomes of initial discussions on AFB**

Liz McIntosh (Fera) provided an update on the disease control policy review which had started in July and was scheduled to be completed in July 2012 when the recommendations on the future disease control programme will be considered by Defra.

The policy review team were looking at the RAS results to help inform the review. Two meetings had already been held on AFB and during the last meeting started to look at new methods/tools on how to control AFB. The next meeting would start to consider EFB and how government (and stakeholders) should respond to this risk.

Liz stressed that the review was at an early stage and would require some revisiting of discussions and ideas when the subclinical RAS results were available and also to consider the response to risks in the round to ensure balance and coherence. Liz said she would share papers and emerging ideas with PMB and SEAG during the review and she would capture and report their views and suggestions to the review team.

Liz reported on some examples from the review team discussions on potential additional responses (tools) to AFB risks:

- Improve disease recognition training to increase the pool of beekeepers who recognise AFB (and EFB). This could be achieved in several ways, including; pc or internet based self-learning training programmes, photos or other visual aids of disease symptoms for using in the apiary, DVDs on disease recognition (and biosecurity) issued to those on BeeBase and members of association and short clips on Facebook YouTube etc.;
- Review, redefine, re-size high risk areas for AFB;
- Improve apiary biosecurity;
- Encourage local beekeeping associations to take specific measures to reduce AFB disease risks on their patch, eg, purchase of sterilisation kit for their members to use; codes of practice on buying and selling bees and nucs.
- Identify ways of managing repeat offenders (regular AFB outbreaks) so that they manage disease risks more effectively

PMB made the following comments on these suggestions:

- the best way for people to learn was through seeing and doing for themselves – so slides and pictures weren't always enough.
- in relation to repeat offenders/difficult beekeepers, PMB agreed that there would always be those who wouldn't disclose (or be aware that) they had disease and those who, through their poor beekeeping practices, persistently undermined the good work of others. In these cases it was felt that a hard line should be taken including sanctions in legislation, controls or destruction applied apiary-wide, charging for inspection visits. In addition, local associations need to play their part in managing difficult beekeepers/ repeat offenders.
- the size of the area to be inspected during outbreaks could be reviewed, particularly for EFB, so that the inspector does not undertake local tracing in neighbouring apiaries but instead focuses on helping the beekeeper sort out the infection in the first apiary to reduce likelihood of recurrence ie, we need to focus our efforts to achieve the best effect.
- To reduce risks of spreading disease from buying or selling bees, we need a domestic health certification system, ideally funded and supported by beekeeping suppliers of queens and nucs in collaboration with local associations. The local associations could help enormously to promote the sales of healthy bees. Aim for voluntary approach, rather than regulations. This work could explore the approach to disease-free certification in New Zealand.

#### 4. **Draft EFB working paper for the review (PR2/5)**

Liz introduced the working paper on EFB and invited the Group to discuss the paper and offer any comments. A lengthy discussion followed which was captured in a paper circulated to PMB on 26 September (see Annex 1 for this paper).

**ACTIONS: 1. Mark Tatchell to discuss with Belinda Phillipson and NBU whether and how to undertake an informal peer review of any unpublished EFB data produced by the NBU which should be considered by the Policy Review Team.**

**5. Sign off notes from 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, July/August highlight report, risks and issues log (PMB 15/1)**

Sign off note of 14<sup>th</sup> meeting for posting on BeeBase

The Board provided the following comments/amendments on the draft note:

- Tim Lovett (BBKA) was concerned that reporting Thymol as a suitable alternative to Fumidil for treating Nosema would lead to the loss of the only approved authorised product for treatment. Brian Ripley said that he meant it was reported as an alternative and not meant as stating that it was a suitable alternative (page 2, paragraph 3).
- Tim asked whether the draft terms of Reference and timeline for the policy review were circulated to the Board (page 5, action point 2). [post script – Liz confirmed that they had been circulated].
- Wally asked whether the discussion on current controls should say imported combs rather than imported queens and asked that the source should be checked (page 7, question 2, bullet point 4).
- The Board requested that the last bullet point should be removed as it didn't make sense (page 7, question 2, bullet point 7).
- Dinah observed that the cost of disease to a beekeeper being £1000 was too high and felt that it should be lower and that £100-£600, depending on size and disease would be a more realistic figure which the group agreed to (page 8, question 5, bullet point 3).

July/August highlight report

Bob queried the number of attendees on the train the trainer courses as he had seen varying numbers. Marie said this was likely to be numbers of those nominated, those that had attended and from what associations. Kim Chadwick was putting together a breakdown of numbers of attendees by region and would circulate to HEG and PMB.

**ACTIONS:** 1. Liz McIntosh to check whether the terms of reference and timeline for the policy review were sent to PMB. 2. Kim Chadwick to send breakdown of train the trainer attendees to Secretary for circulating to PMB and HEG. 3. Secretary to amend minutes of 14<sup>th</sup> meeting reflecting comments above.

6. **Workplan for phase 2 – review of progress with implementing activities in plan (PMB 15/2)**

Liz introduced the workplan for phase 2 and provided updates on the activities that were red which included:

- BBKA Co-ordinator contract - This was co-funding for honorarium paid to the BBKA co-ordinator. The contract was now with BBKA.
- VMD action plan - At the last PMB, Martha Spagnuolo-Weaver said that over the coming months the Suitably Qualified Persons (SQP) training was being developed and that this would be completed at the same time as the review of veterinary medicines. Martha would be invited to attend the December PMB meeting to update the Group on progress.
- BeeBase Co-ordinator – Update covered in agenda item 9.
- Sponsorship work – Liz had been temporarily assigned to assist with the Fera fees and charging review on plant health so was unable to start this work. The assignment had now ended and Liz would revisit this but it was likely that this wouldn't be until the new year.

**(i) Good practice templates**

The latest good practice templates written by NBU's Richard Ball (Varroa, feeding bees and bee improvement) were signed off by CWG and HEG. Carl said that they were designed to be a simplistic look at a disease and if they were too simplistic then should they be adapted to include more information. Wally and Dinah had some comments on the leaflets and Liz requested that these were submitted to her who would then pass them on to Richard Ball for inclusion/reflection in the templates.

**(ii) Gap analysis (PMB 15/6)**

Liz extended her thanks to Tim Lovett who had informed the BBKA Trustees about these results - the headline was that 55 out of 64 associations in England didn't pass on membership details to the NBU for registering on BeeBase which was in contrast to Wales where they operated a 100% progressive data sharing scheme.

Tim updated the Board that he had advised the BBKA Trustees to put some pressure on local associations to encourage registration on BeeBase and/or to pass on their member lists to the

NBU for putting on to BeeBase. The Trustees were happy to encourage associations to encourage their members to register on BeeBase and to have regular reminders perhaps through advertisements in BBKA News. However, the Trustees did not want a heavy handed approach with local associations - this issue would not be solved by a directive from the top but through encouragement, good will and repetition of the message.

Bob said providing exemplar text which could come from the BBKA to their associations would be positive encouragement and perhaps use and distribution of the map in paper 15/6 would provide a helpful visual aid to the task of getting more associations to share data.

Carl noted that neither the BBKA's website nor BeeBase had clear messages in prominent places about registering on BeeBase or joining your local association (respectively). Correcting this seemed to be an obvious first step for both BBKA and NBU to take to help with recruitment of members/registered beekeepers.

Dinah and Wally noted that the map showed Wales as 4 out of 10 associations sharing data which was contrary to the 100% progressive data sharing scheme which Wales operated.

Mark reported that SEAG at their meeting of 22 September, had explored the knotty question of how to estimate the total number of beekeepers. SEAG had agreed that Mark should discuss further with a statistician whether we could estimate the total number of beekeepers using available datasets. Bob Smith queried whether we did indeed need to know total numbers. The meeting agreed that this statistic would be useful for disease control purposes.

Tim raised the point of the importance of having all the registered beekeepers on BeeBase's email address up-to-date. The Chair thought that the NBU had a rolling programme to obtain the email addresses of those registered who hadn't already provided one; she would check this with the NBU and report back to the Board.

**ACTIONS: 1. Liz McIntosh to send comments raised by PMB to Richard Ball on the best practice templates. 2. Chair to discuss further with BBKA on how best they could help to provide exemplar text to local associations for them to use on their membership forms. In addition, PMB asked that the NBU should share the map with local associations, and also to inform the BBKA which of the local associations did not share data. 3. Liz to check with Giles about the gap analysis data for Wales which suggested that not all Welsh associations shared their details with the NBU. 4. Chair to check with the NBU about the process for asking registered beekeepers for their up-to-date email addresses.**

## **7. Indicators for tracking progress with implementation (PMB 15/7)**

Mark Tatchell provided an update on SEAG's discussion on 22 September on the latest version of the indicators. They had decided to insert a 'top level' indicator which was 'improved survival of colonies' and the measure would be 'reduced winter losses of colonies'. SEAG also

agreed to include an indicators to cover Varroa and other diseases (in addition to the foulbroods).

Carl commented that the Board should be aware that none of the indicators or metrics specifically addressed the work of the Communications Working Group (although the outcomes of improved skills etc would depend on effective communications).

The Chair noted the points made and stressed that this was a living document which would be regularly reviewed and re-visited. She asked the Board for their endorsement of the indicators which was duly given.

**ACTION: Mark Tatchell to discuss with Belinda Phillipson any final comments from PMB on the draft indicators, after which the indicators would be re-circulated to PMB (and SEAG).**

**8. Update on BBKA and NDB education programme including plans to embed new materials/courses into local associations training programmes during 2011/12**

Brian Ripley updated the group on progress with the education programme. The BBKA-chaired delivering education group (which included members from BBKA, NDB and Fera) had its third meeting on 19 September which had reviewed the summer training events and planned the winter training events, on which there had been much debate about aims and content. Brian said the red and green Course in Cases were still work in progress – further effort was needed to finalise the video clips which needed further editing. Brian wanted to see more pace behind this work to ensure completion by end of March and in response, BBKA were going to call an emergency meeting to agree a workplan to drive completion.

Another important area discussed by the delivering education group had been the proposal for a BBKA-based national education coordinator to help the local associations with organising their education and training activities. Robin Lewis said the BFA had a member with expertise in this area and could offer advice. Bob supported the idea of more emphasis on delivering education as the local level and Tim proposed that a BBKA education coordinator should run a road show to local associations.

Brian reported that the BBKA Trustees were reviewing the various education committees and groups to streamline as necessary and make sure they worked effectively together. They would conclude their review by end of November.

Liz updated the Group that BBKA had worked with Lantra to develop an accredited course which was pitched at young people at college on land based courses at an introductory level, not necessarily to become a beekeeper but to generate an awareness in beekeeping.

Bob updated the group on the NDB side of the education activities and circulated a list of upcoming courses and those which had been successfully completed. He noted there was a slower uptake in the courses which were now £140 in contrast to last winter then they had

been £45 due to the Fera subsidy. Bob considered that on-going advertising of the courses would be crucial to ensuring sufficient numbers to allow courses to run.

**ACTIONS: 1. BBKA to update PMB at the next meeting about the outcome of current discussions within the BBKA about rationalising and refocusing the various education committees. 2. Martin Smith to contact BFA about their education lead, to share any lessons to help shape and refine BBKA's work.**

**9. BeeBase co-ordinator – progress with recruitment, priorities for this work, implications for budget**

The Chair updated the Board on this item. Resource had been provided in the Healthy Bees Plan for £50k to recruit a BeeBase Co-ordinator to address the recommendations on BeeBase development provided by the Communications Working Group. Due to current funding and recruitment constraints, there had been difficulties in getting permission to recruit. However, Helen had now gained permission to use subcontractors for the rest of 2011/12 for which funding was available. Two people had been identified as candidates to take on this work. Bob expressed disappointment that we were half-way through the year and work had not yet started.

**ACTION: the NBU was developing a workplan for BeeBase development work taking into account the BeeBase brief prepared by CWG in September 2010 and endorsed by PMB. When ready, Liz to circulate the BeeBase workplan to PMB for endorsement.**

**10. AOB and date of next meeting**

The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions to the meeting and extended further thanks to Brian Ripley as it was his last meeting of PMB as he was leaving his role as Chairman of the BBKA.

A gateway review was scheduled to commence mid December/early January. The first meeting with Defra was due for 3<sup>rd</sup> October. At this stage the process wasn't clear but the reviewers may wish to speak to members of the HBP Board and/or working groups as they did during the starting gate review held in 2009.

Tim updated the Board with the news that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) were leading on developing policy in response to the recent ruling in the European Court of Justice on GM pollen in honey. An EU working group would consider this further on 26 September. However, the Board considered that this was likely to have limited implications in the UK due to the low use of GM crops here.

The Chair reported that Fera was aiming to arrange a meeting with the natural beekeeping community and would report back to the Board.

The 16<sup>th</sup> meeting was planned for December. The Secretary will send a Doodle-poll with dates during November.

**ACTIONS: 1. Secretary to circulate Doodle-poll during November for a December meeting of the Board.**

Fera  
September 2011

## Working paper on EFB – views from PMB September 2011

### Input and views on Part 1 of working paper on EFB (PR2/5)

#### 1. Comments on data.

- Check Annex 1 as Greater London and Surrey appear both in table 1a and 1b (and with different numbers for London).
- What factors are leading to the low(ish) incidence of EFB cases in the north – is it simply due to lower densities of beekeepers (than in the south) or it is linked to other factors, such as vegetation?
- Re Annex 1(c) – the data suggest that there is a 20% chance of finding EFB by a follow-on inspection (in the same apiary) – this seems extraordinarily high; similarly from honey sampling – a 4.6% chance of finding disease from a random survey – surely too high?
- Re Annex 4 – Scotland data. The 2011 data (@22/9/11) should be included in this table as it is enlightening - 3478 inspections, 4 cases AFB, 126 cases EFB - again showing comparative ease with which AFB outbreaks may be controlled, compared to difficulty of clearing up EFB. The 126 cases of EFB occurred in 42 apiaries; 12 beekeepers were affected. This continues to illustrate the impact of apiary hygiene. The worst area in Scotland, Perthshire, accounted for 81 cases. These occurred in 26 apiaries owned by just 4 beekeepers. Clear cases of poor apiary hygiene/apiary practice.

### Input and views on Part 2 of working paper on EFB (PR2/5)

#### 2. Q2 – are current controls enough? Stakeholder have made a number of points:

- Need to consider and develop a new policy for beekeepers with recurrent outbreaks of EFB (from whom we can learn a lot about control policy) and also for difficult beekeepers in order to change their behaviours so that they adopt and develop good practice to reduce disease risks. For example, beekeepers with recurrent EFB outbreaks could be charged for inspection visits. In addition,
  - This work could explore how local associations could participate in this policy.
  - Is there scope to tighten the legislation so that certain beekeepers could be barred from keeping bees?

- Need to consider taking a hard line with recurrent EFB outbreaks (and others?) by burning all hives on the apiary site.
- Need to consider accrediting beekeepers/ stratification so that inspectors focus on high risk beekeepers and rarely visit low risk beekeepers except for spot checks or audit purposes. This approach would help free-up inspectors time to focus on work where real improvements could be made. To gain accreditation, the beekeeper would have to 'prove' their disease recognition skills (in a way to be developed/ agreed).
- Need to do more to help the beekeeper take actions themselves – more self-reliant. As the current education and training programmes lead to improved beekeeper skills over the next few years, it would make sense for the NBU to consider a future programme of demonstrating shook swarm to each to the beekeeping associations and/or for specific NBU workshops at the BBKA spring convention on disease recognition for attendees to take away and cascade to their branches (subject to being able to show diseased comb in isolation units, as diseased colonies are subject to standstill).
- There was some support for promoting the use of hospital sites where the beekeeper would separate infected colonies from healthy colonies so that all are treated together – antibiotics and/or shook swarm (check experience in Scotland).
- Given the interim RAS results which indicated a higher likelihood of disease at shared-apiary sites, it would make sense to advise beekeepers not to share sites.
- We should explore local variation in EFB treatment options and outcomes in terms of re-infection rates as this could offer very helpful insights to treatment effectiveness.

3. Q5 – what are the benefits of controls? What would happen if we stopped controlling EFB? Stakeholders suggested:

- Control policy could change so that the inspectors stop carrying out follow up tracings for EFB in neighbouring apiaries within the control/infected area, and instead the inspectors focus their efforts on the beekeeper who has the outbreak to make sure he/she takes all appropriate measures to stop the outbreak, and minimises risk of potential recurrence. However, there was some concern about the spread of EFB between apiaries and it was, therefore, still relevant to carry out follow up tracings.
- Many other EU member states live with EFB and manage without a national control programme. On the other hand, as a national control programme for AFB would still be necessary, would it not make sense for the inspectors to check for EFB too?

- If EFB was de-regulated, then it would be difficult to justify an inspectorate who simply deals with AFB. In addition, as no standstills would be imposed, this could potentially lead to disease spread through unchecked movement of infected colonies. If treating EFB was left to beekeepers, there would be a mixed and variable response, leading to an uncertain outcome in terms of disease control.
  - EFB biology and disease characteristics are not fully understood and hence need to take care when considering whether/how to change EFB policy.
3. Q6 – emerging trends or risk factors that could increase level of infection in England and Wales in next 5-10 years? Some suggestions from stakeholders:
- Natural beekeeping practices could increase risks, as difficult to see what's happening to the brood.

**Input and views on Part 3 of working paper on AFB (PR1/3)** [note: the points below reflect views from a limited number of stakeholders]

4. Option 1 – tighter controls on movements, including pre-sales checks.
- To reduce risks of spreading disease from buying or selling bees, we need a domestic health certification system, ideally funded and supported by beekeeping suppliers of queens and nucs in collaboration with local associations. The local associations could help enormously to promote the sales of healthy bees. Aim for voluntary approach, rather than regulations. This work could explore the approach to disease-free certification in New Zealand.
5. Option 7 - "Ensure" best practice is impractical. We can promote and encourage but there is no place for legislation here, ie. it would be impossible to police this.
6. Option 8 - colony/apiary approach - EFB controls should be at an apiary level not colony level, although if the decision was destruction so that the whole lot was 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".