

**Notes of the Bee Health Advisory Forum  
4<sup>th</sup> Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013  
Room 809, Millbank, Defra, London**

**Present:**

Helen Crews (Chair)	Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera)
Richard Watkins	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
Belinda Phillipson	
Doug Brown	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Tim Lovett	
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Mellis	
Dinah Sweet	Welsh Beekeepers Association (WBKA)
Bob Smith	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Steve Sunderland	Scottish Executive

**Apologies:**

Irene Allen	WG
David Aston	BBKA
Mike Brown	NBU
Amy Byrne	WG
Ken Edwards	
Chris Hartfield	NFU
Wally Shaw	WBKA
Andy Wattam	NBU

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 4th meeting of the Bee Health Advisory Forum.

The Chair highlighted the procurement issues which had arisen with respect to the move of the bee health policy team and the associated funds for the Healthy Bees Plan back into core Defra. This means that it is no longer possible to provide a contract for Mark Tatchell for the input that he provided to the forum. The Chair had formally sent a letter to Mark Tatchell and suggested that the forum should thank him for his contributions. Tim Lovett said that this was a shame as he brought a different perspective to the forum. The issue of science should be revisited by the forum at a later date. During the introductions Belinda Phillipson

explained that as part of the move back to core Defra she was now in the Plant Health Evidence and Analysis team and her future participation in the forum was uncertain. The forum said if possible they would welcome her continued involvement.

## **2. Untabled presentation on behalf of BFA.**

Prior to the meeting John Mellis asked the Chair if he could present an item on behalf of the BFA to which the Chair and Defra Policy agreed. The Steering Group of the Bee Farmers Association of the UK have no confidence in Defra and Fera officials who have responsibility for professional beekeepers and their bees. The BFA feel that the officials are only concerned with doing the bare minimum for statutory disease control. This is highlighted by the discussions on the Apiculture Programme at the previous BHAF but an absence of an item on re-stocking and dead hives from today's agenda. The BFA felt that the summaries of meetings should be circulated more rapidly and suggested at most 10 working days after the meeting. The BFA presented a document they had drafted entitled 'Why the UK needs a proper plan for beekeeping' which highlights the differences between the Bee Health Policy adopted in the UK in comparison to the policy adopted in France. The BFA were unhappy with the UK proposal that was submitted to the EU for the Apiculture Programme and felt that the lack of detail provided to the BHAF could be construed as suspicious. The BFA said that they were still willing to contribute to a structure which benefits all bees and beekeepers but would like a proper UK policy to be developed which would include funding being allocated to bee farmers.

The BFA plan illustrated the disastrous losses of 2012/13 using a number of facts and figures. Following John's presentation there was a great deal of discussion about the figures and agreement that these vary depending on when and where the data is taken from. Tim Lovett said that the numbers will vary but there is a general decline in the number of colonies and beekeepers and although it has not been possible to agree accurate numbers, the forum should take note of the BFA's concerns about losses. He proposed that the aims of the forum should include increasing the number of beekeepers and colonies with the resources we have. The Chair noted the disappointment of the BFA with Defra and Fera officials. For the benefit of the forum the Chair also clarified that at the recent meeting the BFA had with the Minister, the BFA's request for funds for re-stocking was declined. She also noted that the BFA are proposing a specific policy on honey bees which should be wider than just bee health and include other factors such as forage.

**Action 1.** JM and RW to discuss bilateral meetings and related issues outside of forum even if this is to disagree.

Richard Watkins said that bee health policy and funding are focused on pests and diseases but realises that the BFA have an aspiration for this to go wider which is beyond the scope of this forum. He highlighted the announcement that the Minister has made about the review of evidence and policy on all insect pollinators being lead by the Defra Chief Scientist. The Chair asked Richard Watkins to keep the BHAF informed on the wider review.

**Action 2.** RW to provide an update from the pollinator review at next meeting (either personally or invite someone from the review team).

The Chair reminded the forum they can make recommendations that can be sent up to the Minister. Tim Lovett is also frustrated with the lack of progress but feels the BHAF is the best we've got and therefore we should make it work. He said that the forum are willing volunteers who want to work together on bee health and Bob Smith supported this. The Chair was concerned that the forum think that there may be more funds available but she stated clearly that there is no more money. She also pointed out that the pollinator work being lead by the Defra Chief Scientist will have an impact on the bee health work which could be beneficial in terms of joining up various areas including medicines, forage, etc. Tim Lovett proposed holding another bee health research colloquium.

**Action 3.** Various options for reviewing bee health work are likely to be considered and could include a bee health research colloquium as part of the pollinator review. Defra Policy to feed options into the review.

John Mellis enquired about the apiculture programme and Richard Watkins said that we were waiting for a response from the EU following submission of the proposal. John Mellis then asked how the forum could influence what was really delivered with respect to the apiculture programme.

**Action 4.** Defra Policy to define the process for reviewing what can be done under the apiculture programme which will be influenced by the work implemented in response to the consultation.

**Action 5.** The Chair agreed that the summary of the points put forward by BFA should be captured and sent to MG and JM for agreement before circulation with the summary of the full meeting.

**Decision.** With respect to time limits, within Defra 15 working days is the normal working practice for responding to questions, circulating documents, etc. Therefore in future summaries of BHAF meetings would be circulated within 15 working days.

### **3. Consultation responses**

Richard Watkins gave a presentation with a summary of the responses received for the consultation.

**Action 6.** RW agreed to circulate slides from presentation.

Richard thanked Kim Chadwick and Marie Holmes for putting the slides together and everyone who responded. Margaret Ginman pointed out that the respondees did not answer all the questions and therefore this should be reflected in the tables of responses. Tim Lovett asked whether the forum could see a breakdown of the individual associations responses, Richard Watkins thought this would be possible and the Chair suggested this would be acceptable if circulation of the documents was restricted, for example the BBKA Exec. The forum also asked how much of the information from the responses would be available.

Richard Watkins said that a summary of the responses would be published and suggested that the responses themselves will be available in the Defra library.

**Action 7.** RW to double check what is available, where it will be stored and if a breakdown of the individual associations responses can be circulated.

One of the aspects considered by the consultation was training. Steve Sunderland pointed out that the Scottish Government charge £25 for a day's training per applicant and on the whole this seems to be acceptable. There was general discussion about the breadth of views submitted with respect to responses and a concern about the weightings given to these views. Richard Watkins said it was more important to consider the views in the round when drawing up the plan for implementing the changes.

Once the summary of the responses has been published the NBU and stakeholders will work together to produce an implementation plan. Tim Lovett said this could be tricky because the responses could suggest going ahead with all the suggestions. This will be a massive task. For instance how will it be possible to manage doing more on Varroa control while maintaining low levels of foul brood ? Richard Watkins said that this will be considered as part of the process to develop the implementation plan. What is to be implemented will be discussed and agreed by the NBU and associations. This will include defining the outputs. Ministers will need to be informed about responses from the consultation and the proposed implementation plan.

**Action 8.** Richard Watkins to arrange a planning meeting to define the process for implementation [completed 7<sup>th</sup> June]. Defra Policy and NBU to draft a document about the process for drawing up the implementation plan for discussion at the next meeting.

**Action 9.** RW to send links from Pamela Thompson on the EU and Animal Health Law to BHAF for input.

**Action 10.** RW to look at economic and statistical info fed into review. To note papers including statistical and economical outputs from the review are still available at the following link; <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-honey-bee-health>

#### 4. Contingency plan

Richard Watkins introduced this and said that the plan is to test communications with respect to the Asian hornet response plan. The exercise is being lead by the Government Decontamination Service and would have been run earlier in the year but the not all of the major players were available. Tim Lovett asked how this exercise was commissioned. The Chair responded that it is a policy requirement to have 1 contingency planning exercise per year. Richard Watkins cited an incident which took place in November 2012 where a contractor working for Kew reported being stung by a hornet which was initially thought to be an Asian hornet. The NBU had investigated this further and although it is difficult to be certain in the absence of the original insect, it was concluded that it was unlikely to have been an Asian hornet.

## 5. HBP budget transparency.

This item was introduced by Bob Smith, following a meeting with BBKA and BFA colleagues, who wanted to clarify the Fera and Defra spend under the Healthy Bees Plan. For example did all of the £404K under the HBP get spent on bee inspectors ? The Chair responded that this was most likely but agreed that this could be looked into as well as other areas of HBP spend. The benefits of each of the aspects funded under the HBP could then be considered.

**Action 11.** The Chair is to clarify what happened to the underspend on BeeBase coordinator and future spend on BeeBase development.

**Action 12.** Bob Smith agreed to circulate the slides he presented showing his understanding of the breakdown of what was funded under the HBP.

Bob Smith explained that he had expected one of outputs from the Random Apiary Survey to be assessment of the number of inspectors required to keep inspections and levels of pests and diseases at a specific level. The Chair suggested that the numbers of inspectors over the past 20 years should be shared with forum. The Chair agreed to share figures on the number of inspectors funded under HBP, etc to get a common understanding. Tim Lovett says the forum needs to be able to assess the value for money particularly when determining how to slice the cake. The Bee Farmers included points about the value of inspections in their submission to the consultation. They suggested that the costs and benefits of the Disease Accredited Scheme for Honey bees should also be considered.

**Action 13.** Chair to look at break down of figures from business case, measures of success and to discuss in the next meeting with a view to building a new business case.

Bob Smith stated that the HBP is about halfway. Irrespective of funds in future what are the aims, where are we trying to get to. What is the end goal ? The Chair suggested the HBP is a tool that the forum can use. She highlighted the meeting that the BBKA, NDB and BFA are holding in the next 3 weeks to look at plans for future and vision. Doug Brown suggested that maybe the future vision should be widened to cover more than just health. E.g. do we need to develop strategies for informing beekeepers about for example feeding their bees during poor weather conditions.

## 6. Summary of previous meeting.

Various suggestions were made to modify the summary of the previous meeting.

Page 1. Scottish Executive should be modified to read Scottish Government. It should be noted which members joined by phone.

Page 2. Point 2. Third bullet to be reworded as follows; 25% of the available funding to assist bee farmers with restocking and to develop the ability to replace lost colonies with domestically produced stocks.

Page 2. Point 5. First sentence to be reworded to read as follows; Defra noted that any change to the current programme would reduce funding to the National Bee Unit (NBU) possibly resulting in it reducing the amount of work that it will undertake with consequential increased costs for beekeepers.

Page 4. Point 17.

**Action 14.** Richard Watkins to check whether the matched funding provided by NDB students was acceptable to secure HBP funding under the terms of the Business Case approval.

Page 5. Table of actions. Action 1 complete. Action 2 Peter Sutcliffe sent a document from BBKA with revised proposals on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2013 to be considered. Action 2 Margaret Ginman suggested that her action was complete but a revised proposal has not been circulated. Action 2 Bob Smith said that it had been difficult for the NDB to prioritise proposals. The Chair pointed out that there needs to be some prioritisation as least with respect to which courses are delivered first. This could be a basis for prioritisation. A meeting between Margaret Ginman, Tim Lovett and Bob Smith is being held to discuss the proposals.

**Action 15.** Bob Smith, Tim Lovett and Margaret Ginman to meet on 13<sup>th</sup> June to agree positions for funding under scenarios for the new business case and to prioritise proposals. Following the meeting to provide an update on the positions and a list of prioritised proposals.

Action 3 from summary of third meeting. A query was raised about whether the summary notes for the second meeting have been published on BeeBase. [Checked post meeting and found action completed].

**Action 16.** The Chair is to send out an updated highlight report and risk register by Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> June. [Completed]

## 7. AOB

### 7.1 EU decision on neonicotinoids.

Tim Lovett said that the BBKA is very concerned about the impact of the EU ban on neonicotinoids. He suggested that there should be several different actions to address the likely consequences of the ban. This should include (i) advice to farmers about what products can be used now; (ii) strengthening the spray liaison roles; (iii) development of a website where spray usage is logged which can then be cascaded to beekeepers; (iv) risk and impact assessment of the decision. Richard Watkins says Defra is actively working on this with a view to landscape trials. The BFA said that they have not experienced problems with bees working rape. Steve Sunderland clarified The EU decision and said that there is a 2 year moratorium on the approval. If sufficient data can be gathered within this time that indicates there is not a major effect. the approval can be reinstated. However it will be difficult to gather appropriate data during the two year period. Tim Lovett suggested they (beekeeping groups) will lobby independently but in a co-ordinated approach.

**Decision:** the forum noted that they have not discussed the EU decision as they do not feel sufficient evidence has been gathered to either support or counter the decision.

**Action 17.** Members of forum to draft paper on the neonicotinoids for agreement by BHAF and which the Chair agreed could be forwarded to ministers.

### 7.2 Suitably Qualified Persons

Tim Lovett suggested that this is probably in abeyance because there aren't a large number of new products/medicines coming through and also because of the current EU review.

### 7.3 Over winter losses/ no of colonies

John Mellis said that he will not take a honey crop this spring. The Bee Farmers have experienced about 50% losses while the NBU currently have figures of about 28%. Tim Lovett said that the BBKA survey had closed at end of March and the numbers are preliminary but they are not looking good. The season is very late and there is very little forage. John Mellis pointed out that the winter bees have died out before they can produce new generations of bees.

### 8. Date of next meeting

The Forum agreed that they would like to discuss the implementation plan even if this just covers the process. Mike Brown will be key for this. A meeting was proposed for the weeks beginning either 1<sup>st</sup> July or 8<sup>th</sup> July. Steve Sunderland gave his apologies in advance.

<b>Action Number</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Person(s) responsible</b>
1	To discuss bilateral meetings and related issues outside of forum even if this is to disagree.	John Mellis and Richard Watkins
2	To provide an update from the pollinator review at next meeting.	Richard Watkins/ member of review team
3	To feed options including bee health research colloquium into the pollinators review.	Defra Policy
4	To define the process for reviewing what can be done under the apiculture programme which will be influenced by the work implemented in response to the consultation.	Defra Policy
5	The summary of the points put forward by BFA should be captured and sent to MG and JM for agreement before circulation with the summary of the full meeting.	Secretariat
6	To circulate slides from presentation on the consultation.	Richard Watkins
7	To double check what information from the consultation will be available, where it will be stored and if a breakdown of the individual associations responses can be circulated.	Richard Watkins
8	To arrange a planning meeting to define the process for developing the implementation plan [completed 7 <sup>th</sup> June]. Defra Policy and NBU to draft a document about the process for drawing up the implementation plan for discussion at the next meeting.	Richard Watkins/Policy and NBU

9	To send links from Pamela Thompson on the EU and Animal Health Law for input.	Richard Watkins
10	To look at economic and statistical info fed into review.	Richard Watkins
11	To clarify what happened to the underspend on BeeBase coordinator and future spend on BeeBase development.	The Chair
12	To circulate the slides presented showing his understanding of the breakdown of what was funded under the HBP.	Bob Smith
13	To look at break down of figures from business case, measures of success and to discuss in the next meeting with a view to building a new business case.	The Chair
14	To check whether the matched funding provided by NDB students was acceptable to secure HBP funding under the terms of the Business Case approval.	Richard Watkins
15	To meet on 13 <sup>th</sup> June to agree positions for funding under scenarios for the new business case and to prioritise proposals. Following the meeting to provide an update on the positions and a list of prioritised proposals.	Bob Smith, Tim Lovett and Margaret Ginman
16	To send out an updated highlight report and risk register by Wednesday, 12 <sup>th</sup> June. [Completed]	The Chair
17	To draft paper on the neonicotinoids for agreement by BHAF and which the Chair agreed could be forwarded to ministers.	Forum members