

**Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum  
6<sup>th</sup> Meeting 11 October 2013  
Room 203, Nobel House, Defra, London**

**Present:**

Helen Crews (Chair)	Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera)
Mike Brown	
Richard Watkins	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
Kim Chadwick	
Tim Adey	
Tim Lovett	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Mellis	
Chris Hartfield	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Wally Shaw	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Dinah Sweet (by telephone)	
Bob Smith	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Steve Sunderland	Scottish Government

**Apologies:**

Ken Edwards	Husbandry Adviser
Andy Wattam	Fera
Amy Byrne	Welsh Government

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the BHAF and welcomed Tim Adey from Defra's Plant Health Policy Programme who would be presenting an item on the Business Case process for the next phase of the Healthy Bees Plan (HBP).

**2. Highlight report (BHAF/4) – including addition of any new risks**

The Chair invited comments on the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Page 1: The BFA disagreed that good progress had been made as a number of their concerns had not been addressed. The association also queried why the specific benefits to bee farmers, which had been included as a key activity in the previous report, was no longer mentioned. The Chair noted the BFA's concerns and would check why this activity had been deleted.

Page 2:

Financial statement. The Chair noted that the spend in 2012/13 was within 5% of the budget. She would seek internal Fera agreement to forward details of the spend for 2012/13 and this year's half year spend to date to BHAF members. Contracts with the BBKA, NDB and BFA were being finalised and would be sent to the associations before the end of October.

## Dependencies

D1: It was agreed that this needed to be revised to reflect the new broader structure of the Forum. D2: The BFA noted the expense involved in participating in the project.

- ACTION:**
- 1. Chair to check on deletion of bee farmer activity from page 1.**
  - 2. Chair to seek agreement to send to BHAF details of 2012/13 and 2013/14(pt) spend.**
  - 3. Kim Chadwick (KC) to revise Dependency D1 to reflect new structure of Forum.**

## Risk Register

### Risk

1. The Chair clarified that it had been agreed that the project manager role would be part of Fera. This post was being considered under a review of the Agency's Inspectorate Programme. It was likely that the post would be filed by December.
2. A new Varroa product, MAQS Beehive Strips, had been launched earlier this year and it now had 17% share of the market. The NBU had been collecting data from beekeepers in the use of the product and this was being fed back to the manufacturer. It was agreed to add this product to the mitigation column. The lack of progress on the action plan was mentioned but the BBKA appreciated that the VMD was in a difficult position. The BBKA had had a number of conversations with relevant companies but they were reluctant to go through the regulatory hoops to obtain product approval. The NDB noted that there were a number of products in use that had not been registered but no action was being taken by VMD. The Chair agreed an update was needed from VMD and this would be discussed at a future meeting. Risk to remain unchanged (red).
3. To be covered later in the meeting
4. It was agreed this was unchanged (amber).
5. It was agreed to transfer this item to an issues log noting that stakeholders aspirations do exceed funding constraints. The BBKA noted that the Government had shown a willingness to provide funding for a National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) and it was up to the group to come up with proposals on honey bee health which Defra could fight for.
6. The Chair reported that there had been various discussions on the response to the consultation and at the last BHAF meeting Mike Brown had presented a 'straw man' on implementation of the changes to the programme. The NBU had already made good progress on DASH and the first accreditation had taken place. Initially, 60-70 bee farmers had shown an interest but this had now reduced to 30-40. The timeframe for taking the scheme forward was being discussed with the BFA. Concern was raised over the assessment of the consultation responses and whether

the NBU had been involved in the process. The Chair explained that the assessment had been completed by Defra policy but agreed that she and the NBU would undertake a short review of the responses to confirm that the conclusions reached were valid. In the light of this assessment, the NBU would then revisit the implementation plan and include a schedule, timings, etc. and circulate to BHAF members.

7. It was agreed that this should be red/amber as there was a need to progress this.

The potential risk of the National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) to the Healthy Bees Plan was raised. Richard Watkins considered that this was unlikely to have an impact but it was agreed to include this in the register.

- ACTION:**
4. Risk 2: KC to add MAQS Beehive Strips to mitigation column.
  5. Chair to seek update from VMD on action plan to include in future meeting.
  6. Risk 5: KC to transfer to new issues log.
  7. Risk 6: Chair and NBU to review responses to the recent consultation
  8. NBU to revisit implementation plan and include schedule, timings etc. and circulate to BHAF
  9. Risk 7: KC to include potential risk to BHAF from NPS in the register

### **3. Update on the NPS**

Richard Watkins (RW) presented an update on the NPS following Lord de Mauley's announcement in June. A stakeholder workshop was to take place on the 24<sup>th</sup> October and a draft report on the Status and Value of Pollinators and Pollinator Services and a pre-workshop questionnaire had been sent to invitees requesting comments. It was planned to publish the draft Strategy for public consultation in January 2014 with a view to implementation in April. It was envisaged that discussions with various groups would take place during the consultation period. In addition, the Natural History Museum was hosting a workshop on the 17<sup>th</sup> October to which various academics had been invited to discuss monitoring.

Defra had funded a stakeholder mapping exercise which had been undertaken by Newcastle University. This had been expanded from its original remit which just focussed on beekeepers to include other pollinator stakeholders. Richard agreed to check when this would be published and if it was possible to send to BHAF members. The WBKA noted that the Welsh Pollinator strategy had been published and the Welsh Government had approached the association to provide input.

The BBKA noted that it had no confidence that anything positive would be achieved. It had not seen the documents for the workshop and was unsighted about its objectives and questioned the role of the BHAF in the process. Richard confirmed that BHAF had been kept informed of developments on the NPS and explained that the purpose of the workshop was to discuss the current situation, what we wanted the position to be in the future and how we were going to work together to achieve it. The workshop outcome would inform the development of the strategy. Richard agreed to check if a list of stakeholders attending the

workshop was available for distribution to BHAF members. The NFU suggested that if it appeared that the NPS would impact on the HBP, BHAF would need to respond.

- ACTION:**
- 10. RW to check when the stakeholder mapping report would be published.**
  - 11. RW to check if a list of attendees for the workshop was available.**

#### **4. Business case process**

Tim Adey explained that Defra's budgetary situation was tight and the position was getting worse. Most Defra areas were reducing their spend. The proposed budgets for 14/15 and 15/16 were currently being finalised and therefore indicative numbers for the proposed HBP budget for 15/16 would be needed soon. Tim requested a short paper before the end of the year followed by a formal business plan in the summer. Although a plan for three years should be prepared, there was no budget provision beyond 15/16 and therefore approval would only be obtained for that year. Any funding for the HBP would need to come from within the Animal health group budget as there was no new money available. Therefore, the case did not need to be submitted to Defra's Finance Panel. Tim stressed that a robust case would need to be presented which demonstrated the achievements to date and what will be achieved in the future.

The BBKA asked what budget was being considered and thought dealing with diseases and research was notably lacking from the HBP. The opportunity should be taken to look at what was included – for example, are the additional bee inspectors necessary? The NFU considered there were still some critical issues that needed to be addressed and these should still be raised even though budgets were tight. The BFA suggested a small subgroup be set up to consider this issue and this was welcomed by the Chair as this would help to inform the plan. She stressed the need to be realistic about the budgetary position and the need to prioritise proposals.

- ACTION:**
- 12. BHAF to convene a small sub-group to consider proposals for the next phase of the HBP.**

#### **5. Indicators of progress**

The Chair reminded the forum of the purpose of the indicators and the evidence on benefits that they will provide in developing the new business case.

##### Indicator

1. Colony losses. The forum discussed the merits of including losses as an indicator in its present form. The weather had a considerable impact on the figures and therefore they did not give a good indication of colony survival. The NBU had mapped historical data back to the 1960's but were not able to predict future trends. However, they were talking to the Met Office in relation to exotic threats. The NDB considered that the BBKA's survey on colonies going into winter would be a better indicator of a sustainable population which was the objective of the HBP. The BBKA agreed that taking the measure later in the year would be preferable and reflect how

hard beekeepers had worked to build up stocks. The NBU also had its randomised husbandry survey which included data on management, foraging etc. It was agreed the indicator should remain but another line on historical weather data should be included to put the colony losses into context.

## 2. Improved beekeeping husbandry skills

(i) The Chair considered there needed to be a change of emphasis and suggested including a line to reflect Bill Cadmore's (now David Blower's) work. The BBKA were asked to provide a summary of this work for inclusion.

(ii) and (iii) The NDB considered that it was necessary to encourage and challenge people moving to the next level and focus more on the intermediate level. The BBKA thought 1200-1300 beekeepers were taking the [Basic] exam this year and urged caution on moving away from the Basic beekeeping assessment. It was difficult to get some beekeepers to take the Basic qualification anyway as many did not like to take exams. Increasing the numbers was also problematic due the available number of assessors where there was a real cost element, such as fuel, etc. The Chair asked the BBKA to consider a reasonable indicator and provide a cumulative figure.

The WKBA reported that the number of members who passed the Basic beekeeping assessment this year was just under 1%. However, over the last 5 years, approximately 7% have gained the qualification. The association's major aim was that 50% of members would achieve this qualification in the next 5 years although long travelling distances and a small pool of assessors were limiting factors. The WBKA suggested it would be useful to include the increase in training apiaries within local associations. The Chair agreed to contact local associations on behalf of BHAF for this data.

The BBKA suggested that a proper survey of beekeepers should be undertaken to get some hard data and admitted that the association should know more about its members than it currently did. However, the numbers of beekeepers/colonies in associations could be included as an indicator.

(iv) The NBU's survey received around 1200 responses from 5000 requests. It was suggested that the survey be amended to include the number of training courses attended and the honey yield obtained. In addition, all Bee inspectors could be contacted to ask, in their opinion, how many hives have Varroa.

## 3. Transition of evidence from peer-reviewed journals cited in popular beekeeping press

The BBKA expressed disappointment at the loss of the Communications Working Group particularly at a time when the IPI was starting to deliver results. The Chair agreed that the Comms strategy needed to be refreshed. The indicator currently only related to NBU data and it was agreed that it would be useful to include other sources. The Chair agreed to consider refining the wording.

4. No increases in the number of exotic honey bee pests and diseases becoming established in the UK

The Chair agreed to check the entry for the ispot website.

5. Reduced incidence of foulbrood disease in the UK

- (i) The NBU agreed to review the risk points.
- (ii) The Chair questioned the usefulness of the indicator
- (iii) The NBU considered that a reference to apiaries would be more appropriate. There were also seasonal implications, weather, confinement, lack of forage and stress to consider.

6. (7) Increased/improved confidence in beekeeping data/no's of beekeepers/hives

Any reference to effects of the economic climate on the number of new beekeepers?

**ACTION: 13. Chair to revise indicators as noted below with policy/NBU and develop list of suggestions for comments.**

- 1. Colony losses – add new line on historical weather data
- 2. Improved beekeeper husbandry skills - Contact local associations for data on training apiaries
- 3. Transition of evidence - consider inclusion of data from other sources
- 4. Exotic pests – check ispot website entry
- 5. Foul brood – review risk points/references

14. **BBKA to provide a summary of Bill Cadmore's (David Blower's) work.**

## **6. AOB**

The Chair noted the following actions for BHAF:

- To confirm the HBP was worth continuing
- What the indicators should be
- What associations want in the next phase of the HBP

## **7. Next meeting**

The next meeting would include R&D and the implementation plan for the revised bee health programme. It was proposed that this be held in York.

## Table of actions

Action Number	Action	Person(s) responsible
	<b>Indicators</b>	
1	Check on deletion of bee farmers activity from page 1	Chair
2	Seeks agreement to send BHAF details of 2012/13 and 2013/14(pt) spend	Chair
3	Revise Dependency D1 to reflect new structure of Forum	KC
	<b>Risk register</b>	
4	2. Add MAQS Beehive Strips to mitigation column	KC
5	2. Seek update from VMD on action plan to include in future meeting	Chair
6	5. Transfer risk to new issues log	KC
7	6. Review responses to consultation	Chair/NBU
8	6. Revisit implementation plan and include schedule, timings, etc. and circulate to BHAF	NBU
9	7. Include potential risk to BHAF from NPS in the register	KC
10	Check when stakeholder mapping report available	RW
11	Check if list of attendees for the workshop is available	RW
12	Convene small sub-group to consider proposals for next phase of HBP	BHAF
13	Indications to be revised as follows and sent to BHAF for comment/suggestions	KC
	Add new line on colony losses re historical data	KC
	Contact local associations for data on training apiaries	Chair
	Consider inclusion of data from other sources (transposition of evidence)	Chair
	(exotic pests) Check Ispot entry	Chair
	(Foul brood) Review risk points	Chair/NBU
	Provide summary of Bill Cadmore/David Blower's work	BBKA