

10th September 2009



Our Ref: ZVG/AB 100909

Tim Lovett
President
The British Beekeepers Association
The Roothings
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KT10 0LU

Dear Tim,

I am writing further to your letter of 8th September, our telephone discussion that day, the roundtable discussion at Number 10 on Wednesday, and our subsequent conversation.

First of all, I would like to thank you for being so candid. Although I am disappointed that you felt you had to write, it is helpful for me to understand better your concerns. In replying, I would like to thank you for reiterating your Association's commitment to continuing to work with Fera (and the other parties to the Healthy Bees Plan, "HBP") on what we both recognise are commonly agreed objectives.

Taking your concerns in turn:

- Arrangements for HBP; I have asked for the terms of reference to be reviewed and refined, to make it absolutely clear that the Project Management Board is indeed just that, and not another "stakeholder forum" (of which there are several). As a consequence, at the meeting on 8th September, the Board discussed my suggestions and agreed some revised terms of reference. They also endorsed the governance arrangements for implementing the Plan and stressed their commitment to the aims and success of the Plan, whilst accepting, in the spirit of partnership working, that they may not be able to support every individual decision. We do need, around that table, all the relevant perspectives, including that of the amateur beekeeper. I recognise the demands on those people who participate, especially volunteers, and also that the formal business of the Board may not be entirely everyone's cup of tea.
- I accept that the consultation over the recent call for proposals to be funded with £100k of additional Defra research money was not ideal. It was however very important that we seized the opportunity swiftly. I anticipated that the social science element may well not have been your Association's first choice. Defra as a whole though, in its Evidence Strategy, is committed to ensuring that both natural and social sciences are brought to bear in achieving policy outcomes. Furthermore, this particular proposal was supported by the other parties we consulted.
- On the wider issue of consultation and engagement, I also accept that we need to continue to work hard with you and all stakeholders to establish a mutually productive way of working. Given that much of your Association's business is conducted with our National Bee Unit, I am proposing that Dr Helen Crews, Head of Fera's Inspectorates programme, is now your primary point of contact with Fera. She will ensure other Fera contacts are appropriately engaged with those colleagues of yours you nominate to front the relationship.

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- Finally, recognising the very important contribution that the BBKA can continue to make, it would be helpful if you could indicate those particular areas of work of the HBP where you and your members feel you can engage most productively. We regret the decision of the BBKA to withdraw from participation in the HBP Project Management Board, but will continue to listen to your views on its implementation, and endeavour to engage amateur beekeepers and their associations in delivery of the plan regionally and nationally.

I understand that your letter to me has been seen by many people in the regions and may therefore be a cause of some concern. I hope you do not mind therefore that my reply to you will also be seen by colleagues throughout the regions, so that Fera and the BBKA can be seen to be engaging constructively.

Tony Harrington, Mike Wray, and I remain available to discuss any further concerns and suggestions you may have for how we might move forward to a more fruitful relationship.

Yours sincerely,



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