

**Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
10th Meeting – 17 July 2014
Room 52F23 Sand Hutton, York**

Present:

Louise Mount (Chair)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
Mike McGuinness	Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera)
Marie Holmes	
Mike Brown	
Tim Lovett ☎	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
David Aston	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Margaret Ginman	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Wally Shaw	
John Bowles	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Ken Basterfield	
Bob Smith	
Denise Burgh	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Steve Sunderland	Scottish Government

Apologies:

Chris Hartfield	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Andy Wattam	Food & Environment Research Agency
John Mellis	Bee Farmers' Association
Richard Watkins	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Jane Jones	Welsh Government (WG)
Irene Allen	
Amy Byrne	

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 10th meeting of the BHAF including Denise Burge of VMD who spoke about VMD's action plan, oxalic acid use and the enforcement team. Ken Basterfield of NDB and John Bowles of WBKA were also welcomed as guests to the Forum.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The meeting was asked if they had any comments on the draft notes of the 9th BHAF meeting. The following points were raised:

Remove non-compliance notifications from the description of Louise's role on page 1.

Update on actions from 9th BHAF Notes

- 1) Complete. Rewording provided on counting hives project by Margaret for 8th meeting note text.

- 2) Complete. Update provided by Mike Brown on implementation plan progress and timings.
- 3) Ongoing. Benefits map will be revisited and refreshed to reflect phase 3.
- 4) Complete. Link provided by Margaret on bumblebees imparting pathogens to honeybees.
- 5) Complete. 3 new issues added to highlight report.
- 6) Complete. Summer colonies number was possible to extract from BeeBase.
- 7) Complete. Proposed metric forwarded by Bob on Varroa.
- 8) Complete. Ratio of affected apiaries : affected beekeepers was possible.
- 9) Complete. Giles' new role was based within the Fera joint venture as Head of Crop Science where it was anticipated apiculture would remain within his area of responsibility, the amount of time dedicated to apiculture was yet to be determined but it was expected for Giles to provide advice where possible. The vacancy for Research Coordinator was advertised and Dr Kat Roberts of Exeter University was the successful applicant and would join the team in October. David Aston welcomed the news of Dr Roberts appointment and felt that research had lost its way within the HBP due to the disbandment of the Science and Evidence Advisory Group and would like the forum to enhance any research. It was noted that the research part of the NBU would sit in a different agency on 1st October. However, a Long Term Supply Agreement (LTSA) was drafted to buy back time, and research was accounted for within this. The LTSA was a 5 year contract between inspectorates and the advisory part of new agency.
- 10) Complete. No continuity questions for Giles received.
- 11) Complete. 2013/14 education activities report received.
- 12) Complete. Information on Trailblazers sent to Richard.
- 13) Complete. Research into feasibility of BFA involvement in Trailblazers scheme sent to BFA. Margaret wished to express thanks to Richard Watkins for his efforts on this work.
- 14) Complete. Update on WBKA plans received.
- 15) Complete. Funding proposals received by all stakeholders. There was an oversubscription for the available funds. Marie would contact individuals to discuss how funding should be apportioned.
- 16) Complete. Queries on Understanding Honey Bee Health Stakeholders' presentation received.
- 17) Ongoing. Report on action 16 to be circulated to the Forum once in the public domain.
- 18) Complete. Correspondence on Home Office oxalic regulations circulated to Forum.
- 19) Complete. Oxalic issue was covered later in the meeting at agenda point 5.
- 20) Complete. Continued correspondence with Home Office was underway. This was under review as oxalic acid fell under the Dangerous Poisons Act. Wally submitted the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal (EMA) products report to Home Office for background on how beekeepers used oxalic acid and what recommendations were made for its use.

3. Highlight Report – including addition of any new risks

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

Risk 1 – Remove Project Manager appointment comment, and add a section on the potential impact of the Cabinet reshuffle. Lord DeMauley remained in post and Elizabeth Truss was appointed as Secretary of State in place of Owen Paterson.

Risk 2 - Reword description to be more specific.

Risk 3 – Reword consequence column as headline indicator was different.

Risk 4 – Ok.

Risk 5 – Delete risk 'lack of agreement in obtaining consensus for implementation of consultation responses, this was no longer relevant.

Risk 6 – Reword actions planned column to be more meaningful to all as acronyms were present. It was discussed to keep this as a risk as it tied in with the Strategy and connected with CAP and biodiversity. The group agreed an organisation diagram on the National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) would be helpful.

ACTION 1: Marie to update highlight report.

ACTION 2: Defra Policy to develop an organisation diagram of those involved in the NPS work.

One new issue was identified:

There was concern expressed regarding research funding and how the Forum would identify and become proactive in science.

4. Update on future of Fera/ new agency

During April Owen Paterson announced a merger between the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency (AHVLA) and the Inspectorates function of Fera which included plant health and seeds, bees, plant varieties and GM inspectorates. Fera inspectorates comprised approximately 280 staff who would be merging with the 2200 AHVLA staff. Mike McGuinness was on a project team for implementation and during w/c 07/07/14 submitted the business case to Secretary of State. The case was approved by a finance panel and the team were in the practical phase of moving over projects and staff. Chris Hadkiss was appointed as CEO for the new agency which was yet to be named. The NBU were being split and 8 research staff would remain within the Joint Venture.

ACTION 3: Mike to provide organogram of new organisation once finalised.

The aim was to make the transition as smooth as possible to enable business as usual. The joint venture (JV) part of Fera were still looking for a JV partner and were in the process of reviewing expressions of interest. It was planned for expressions of interest to be further reduced to 2 by the autumn before final appointment by next year. The JV would build business from existing arrangements and Defra would retain a stake in the new venture, buying existing skills and expertise and putting in place 5 year contracts.

A query was raised on how the NBUs position in a new agency would influence its work as a lot more than the statutory minimum was covered. It was felt this shouldn't change and the idea of the inspectorate functions moving into a new agency was to ensure government kept control.

The ownership and future of BeeBase was discussed. Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Defra owned it, and knowledge management development was supplied by a team based in the JV. Support for BeeBase was factored into the LTSA.

5. VMD update on progress with medicines

The Chair welcomed Denise Burge to the Forum who provided an update on the action plan, oxalic acid and advertisements. VMD were happy to attend each BHAF meeting if needed.

Action plan

The 13 point bee action plan on VMD's website had been removed as it was completed. As a follow up to removal VMD had published articles in the beekeeping press, most recently in Scottish Beekeepers magazine and were presently working with Jason Learner of the NBU on clarification of what products could be used legally. There was still plenty of information available on the website on other products that could be used under the cascade system which also included a list of vets who were happy to work with beekeepers to import the products. There were 3 new products to treat varroosis since 2009, Maqs beehive strips were the most recent. It was asked whether the Forum were happy with the removal of the action plan. Denise said she would add it to the agenda at the next meeting VMD bees meeting in November.

Hive cleanser advertisements

Advertisements for hive cleansers were a concern with the increasing claims of medicinal properties which were unverified. Some time ago the VMD agreed with BBKA if a product did not make medicinal claims to treat varroa it could be left, however if medicinal claims were being made all were encouraged to notify the VMD enforcement team

enforcement@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk

Denise read out a statement relating to products intended for the cleansing of beehives:

In October 2013 the Federal Agency for Medicines and Health Products (famhp) ruled under their 'Classification of Borderline Products' that, within the EU, products intended for the cleansing of beehives to minimise acarids would be considered veterinary medicinal products. VMD has recently carried out a review of the 'most popular' unauthorised products available for use by bee-keepers in the UK. Nine manufacturers have been identified who supply the UK market with these products. Three are located in the UK; the others are in Europe and the US. These manufacturers will be written to asking them to either submit an application for an MA for their products or to change their product labelling and associated literature to remove any claims relating to treatment or prevention of acarid infestation. The

VMD does not wish to remove these products from the market and we anticipate that companies will choose to amend their labelling. It is hoped that both the UK and non UK companies will cooperate in making the changes as soon as possible. With regard to products held in stock, no product recalls will be requested and products already within the retail chain will remain on sale. We hope allowing a sell through period will limit any possible commercial or financial impact to the industry or any welfare concerns for bee keepers caused by lack of product availability.

Oxalic acid

There was a discussion on the recent confusion surrounding the use of oxalic acid. It was requested that its use was further defined and an advisory leaflet issued to beekeepers.

The Veterinary Medicine Regulations 2013 stated that if an animal product was to be put into the food chain then:

- Only authorised veterinary medicinal products could be administered in accordance with the label instructions should be used;
- Products administered in accordance with an animal test certificate may be used.

Honey bees were classed as a food producing animal and therefore beekeepers must comply with these regulations.

Currently, there were no UK registered oxalic acid treatments for honey bees. However, beekeepers were able to apply for EU approved medicines which are available in EU Member States through a Special Import Certificate (SIC). There are a two registered oxalic acid medicines available to beekeepers. Api-Bioxal is a registered oxalic acid treatment in Italy and Ecoxal is a registered oxalic acid treatment in Spain. These were both available under the scheme and could be prescribed by vets who participated in the scheme. It was raised that there was the possibility vets didn't understand the problem and prescribed what the beekeeper requested and further education of vets was required. Steve Sunderland said Scottish veterinary schools had a module on beekeeping, the NBU go to universities and veterinary open days plus Ken has hosted veterinary students on his farm.

ACTION 4: Denise, Nick and Mike Brown to discuss advisory leaflet on oxalic acid use.

New product applications – Unfortunately VMD weren't able to disclose whether there were future varroa treatments in the pipeline or not and products couldn't be promoted until authorisation was granted. It was agreed it would be useful that when authorisation was granted that the company set out a launch of the product as it was felt new products were being missed by beekeepers.

A question was posed on what had happened to the bee Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) role? This role was shelved due to the new Animal Health Act which superseded SQPs.

Wally Shaw had been liaising with Home Office on oxalic acid use. Oxalic acid was classed as a part 1 poison. Part 1 poisons could only be sold to members of the public by a registered pharmacist. It was acknowledged that oxalic acid perhaps shouldn't have been

placed as a class 1 poison as outlined by the EMEA and Home office were introducing a concentration threshold. This meant that when amendments to the Act take effect, solutions below 10% would not require a licence and could be purchased by members of the general public from non-pharmacists.

The Home Office laid a clause and schedule to amend the Poisons Act 1972 before the House of Commons as part of the Deregulation Bill 2014 during July. The Bill was now passed to the House of Lords where it was likely to be debated in October. Because of this delay in securing a committee date for the House of Lords phase, the amendments would not take effect until spring 2015. The Forum queried whether it could be represented in an official capacity when decisions were made on oxalic acid use.

ACTION 5: Louise to investigate whether BHAF could be involved with negotiations.

6. HBP Indicators/KPI's

It was queried why a honey crop number didn't feature as an indicator to demonstrate health and performance of bees. There was a debate on why this hadn't been included which centred on it being a weather dependent measure and therefore a poor measure of the HBP. Another suggestion was to grant a score on whether it was a good weather year. It was pointed out that if the HBP was to increase the proportion of honey sales it would be sensible and work towards a target, however there was no target and was out of remit.

It was decided to reduce the number of indicators measured as there were too many and should show progress on targets and actionable measures.

The group agreed to measure DASH and the apprenticeship scheme. Margaret agreed to consult with BFA members on potential measures.

ACTION 6: Margaret Ginman to consult with BFA members on an apprenticeship scheme and DASH measure.

7. Update on progress with implementation plan

Mike Brown provided an update on progress with the implementation plan. The Plan was developed from 26 recommendations identified from the policy review. The draft plan included: scope, what was already being done, what proposed to do, who does it, timescale and risks/issues. These were populated around the topics of foulbrood, varroa, nosema, small hive beetle, tropilaelaps and Asian hornet. Some meetings had been held with stakeholders but further work on the Plan wouldn't be until the autumn due to new agency pressures, Asian hornet contingency plan and the active beekeeping season. Some of the Plan however, was being implemented such as DASH and baseline inspections of bee farmers who were in the scheme so some things were happening prior to timetables being agreed. It was acknowledged that a sub-group similar to that of KPI sub-group should be formed to work on the Plan outside of BHAF meetings and report back in with progress at each would be helpful.

There was a discussion on European foulbrood which was typically the strain 1 type per apiary, an element of the Plan was to build up a greater knowledge of the different strain types.

8. Update on National Pollinator Strategy (NPS)

The consultation period ran from 6th March until 2nd May and received 335 responses. 20 were from beekeeping associations and 65 from individual members. Key themes were concerns on habitat loss, pesticides - both use and asking pesticide companies to carry out research, drivers for change i.e. were there enough incentives and regulatory initiatives for the NPS, was it too voluntary and was there an overreliance on volunteers for the monitoring side. Generally there was a lot of support on a partnership approach whilst recognising the need for cross-government appreciation on pollinators. The call to action had received a lot of support with volunteers helping with the messages.

There was a delay in finalisation as the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) launched an inquiry into the draft strategy. This was a follow up to an inquiry carried out in 2013 on pesticides and pollinators to check whether the NPS addressed the issues recommended. The EAC report was expected by August which would delay publication of the NPS until autumn, most likely October. In the meantime the team were continuing with the summer call to action launch 'Bees Needs Food and a Home' which relayed 5 simple actions:

1. Grow more flowers, shrubs and trees
2. Let it grow wild
3. Cut grass less often
4. Don't disturb insect nests and hibernation spots
5. Think carefully about whether to use pesticides

The Forum viewed an animation which explained the NPS and the issues it addressed. The animation and more detailed advice with links to other member's sites such as RHS planting list was published on the website <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/Bees-needs>

David Aston commended the stabilisation and increase of honeybees in England was a positive message and part of that was due to the Healthy Bees Plan where education, training, government and inspectorate all did their part.

9. AOB

Tim asked whether the NBU would be present at the next BBKA spring convention scheduled for 17th-19th April 2015. The NBU intended to continue to attend and lead workshops.

The Forum requested an update on progress with the Insect Pollinator Initiative (IPI).

ACTION 7: Louise/Richard to provide and update on the IPI from Belinda Phillipson.

Table of actions

Action Number	Action	Person(s) responsible
1	Update highlight report	Marie Holmes
2	Develop an organisation diagram of those involved in the NPS work.	Richard Watkins/ Louise Mount
3	Provide organogram of new organisation once finalised.	Mike McGuinness
4	Discuss advisory leaflet on oxalic acid use.	Denise Burge/ Nick Renn/ Mike Brown
5	Investigate whether BHAF could be involved with oxalic acid negotiations.	Louise Mount
6	Develop a indicator measure for apprenticeship scheme and DASH	Margaret Ginman
7	Provide update on IPI.	Richard Watkins/ Louise Mount

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 23rd September, 11:00-15:00, Nobel House, London.