

Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
29th meeting
Teleconference hosted from Defra, Sand Hutton, York
18th September 2019, 10:30 – 12:30

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Kevin Beattie (KB)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP) - minutes	
Alice Harrison (AH)	Defra – Endemics and Traceability Policy
Myles Munro (MM)	Defra – Veterinary Medicines Directorate
Nigel Semmence (NS)	Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) – National Bee Unit (NBU)
Rebekah Clarkson (RC)	
Julian Parker (JP)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government
Luis Molero (LuM) Fiona Hight (FH) Jackie Quigley (JQ)	Scottish Government
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers’ Association (BFA)
Pam Hunter (PH)	British Beekeepers Association (BBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers’ Union
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University

Apologies received from:

Wally Shaw	Welsh Beekeepers’ Association
Dan Basterfield Ken Basterfield	National Diploma in Beekeeping
Ged Marshall	Bee Farmers’ Association
Maureen Wakefield	Fera Science Ltd
Leyland Walker	DAERA, Northern Ireland

1. Welcome - BP

BP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

LuM introduced himself, as this was his first BHAF, having taken up post as Lead Bee Inspector for Scotland on 1st August. LuM explained that he had previously worked for APHA as a veterinary inspector, had been keeping bees for seven years, and was due to visit Jersey next week to learn about the Asian hornet response there.

A preliminary matter was raised by LM, namely whether any forum members were aware of UK beekeepers exporting by-products such as wax foundation.

LM had been working on this issue with a Defra colleague, AH – also attending today. The context was that post-EU exit, the UK would be a 3rd country for the purposes of exporting to EU countries. For the UK to be able to provide an export health certificate, Acariasis (acarine) would need to be notifiable, but the current position was that it was not notifiable in the UK or at an EU level.

Acarine had been removed from the list of restrictions, but still appeared in the animal by-products rules, so the UK would not be able to sign a certificate for apiculture by-products, and there was no opportunity to change the certificate by 31st October.

MG advised that the issue had been raised with her this week, and asked to meet with LM once there had been an opportunity to examine the issue further, as it could affect one or two bee farmers.

MG agreed to let KC know if any beekeepers in Wales would be affected.

2. Minutes of 28th meeting – RC

Ged Marshall had sent apologies and this had not been noted in the minutes.

There were no further comments on the minutes.

Quarter 1 Highlight Report (April – June 2019)

Quarter 1 had been busy – a workshop had been run at the BHAF regarding the future Healthy Bees Plan. Education contract extensions had been accepted, and contractors had submitted information to contribute to the Healthy Bees Plan Review.

RC referred to the Dependencies and Risks Register: KC had raised a point about dependencies regarding Wales, and the risk regarding Varroa medicines had been removed.

Regarding the issue of retirement within NBU senior leadership team, JP agreed with RC that it would be worth reviewing/amending this issue; also, to be mindful that the current appointments in the role of National Bee Inspector and Head of the National Bee Unit were temporary.

PH referred to page 2 – item 3 (Apiculture funding). It was stated that the programme had been agreed for 2019-22. PH asked about the position regarding Treasury funding once the UK exits the EU. BP explained that this was not clear cut, but once the UK had left we would not be able to access funding. While the UK remains in the EU, funding could be accessed – a bid had been

submitted to the Treasury for replacement funding, so it was expected that there would be no shortfall in funding.

No further comments/concerns were raised about the Highlight Report.

3. Progress on Healthy Bees Plan Review – KB

The Healthy Bees Plan had been a 10-year plan and officially ended in 2019.

The review of the plan had been taking stock of the last 10 years and looking ahead to the next strategy.

The Review was being project managed by RC. There had been good progress and work was ongoing towards a deadline for completion of December 2019. This could yet be affected by issues such as Asian hornet and Brexit.

The Review would take the form of several chapters – an outline had been created. It was anticipated that the total length of the review document would be about 100 pages including an introduction, a section on the scope of the Review, and chapters covering each of the 10 projects that make up the body of the Review.

The projects have involved Defra, APHA, Fera, IAFRI (Newcastle University), BBKA, BFA, and NDB. Well done to colleagues in Defra's Veterinary Medicines Directorate who had managed to complete their report first.

We now had LM's draft report on Working Together, to which forum members had contributed and which would be discussed at today's forum. We had also received Giles Budge's (IAFRI) report on applying risk-based algorithms to the Red-Amber-Green system used by NBU for prioritising apiary inspections.

Other reports were fairly close to completion and over the next few months these would be collated and circulated among forum members as a final draft for comment.

KB thanked all concerned for their contributions, which would feed into the new Healthy Bees Plan.

4. Draft Chapter for the Healthy Bees Plan Review – Project 5.1

LM echoed KB's thanks for forum members' involvement in this – all comments had been welcome. Material for this project had been gathered at a BHAF workshop held on November 2018. LM apologised for the delay in drafting the report but observed that it been a busy period.

Some topics such as DASH had not been covered in this report as they would be specifically covered elsewhere in the Review.

Some examples suggested during the workshop had not been included in the report, as they did not seem to showcase as wide a range of benefits as others. Some which had not been specifically raised at the workshop, for example the dramatic growth of registrations on BeeBase, had been included as they seemed suitable for this type of report.

The report discussed how the Plan had been managed and how the Forum had developed. There was a section on Policy/Comms and on Science/Education. A number of case studies had been

included, not all of which had been discussed in detail. Some information had been gathered from outside the forum, so Forum members should have the opportunity to comment on the report.

MG commented that the case studies were good but could be livelier - in particular, those relating to apprenticeships and to DWV. MG offered to provide some extra information, including quotes.

MG asked whether figures would appear in this report to show spending on education. LM explained that these figures would appear in the reports that RC is producing.

CH said it was important to be open about the fact that Bee Connected had not been as successful as we would have liked. It was a good tool, and it would be good to have more farmers signed up, but so far this had not happened. If we did not recognise this sort of shortcoming, we may face criticism.

PH agreed – Bee Connected was an excellent idea and thought needed to be given to how farmers could be persuaded to participate. Both beekeepers and farmers needed to be involved. Perhaps there was a need to consider publicity.

LM said that there had been success in terms of the increase in the number of BeeBase registrations, but there was a need to think about our communications approach to improve take-up of initiatives like Bee Connected.

The forum agreed that this chapter could be signed off, subject to LM making the changes discussed.

5. New Healthy Bees Plan (HBP) Objectives - BP

BP referred to the slides accompanying this item.

At the June meeting, forum members had been asked for ideas and from these, themes had been identified.

The Defra Policy Team had reviewed the ideas and processed them with a view to removing duplication. Work to develop the new Plan was still in progress – the current working title was “HBP 2020”.

“Healthy Bees Plan” was quite a well-recognised brand.

4 draft outcomes for the new Plan had been produced.

BP felt that it was good to recognise that knowledge exchange was one of the themes that had emerged; also education, and supporting science and R&D.

Some themes that emerged had not been taken forward, e.g. agriculture, types of crop grown and land management. These appeared to be beyond the scope of the Healthy Bees Plan but there were elements of these that were being covered elsewhere in Defra.

On the subject of funding the provision of medicines, there were finite resources available for bee health, and providing medicines would mean that it would not be feasible to continue to fund the current level of inspections.

Nutrition was an area where there was a shared interest with the National Pollinator Strategy.

BP also explained that, while various suggestions had been made around the subject of regulation, this was felt to be beyond the scope of HBP. Regulations were covered under the first Plan. The

current approach taken by government was that new regulations could only be introduced if absolutely necessary.

Any immediate thoughts were invited, as well as comments once forum members have had an opportunity to reflect.

MG commented that subsidised treatments for Varroa would make a huge difference across the beekeeping sector, and so she did not agree with this suggestion being excluded.

NC welcomed the inclusion of queen rearing, having argued for its inclusion in the original HBP but having been informed that it had not been in scope.

BP confirmed that there should be scope for work on queen rearing in the new plan. If the new plan were also to run for 10 years, changes would likely have to be made to the plan during that period.

PH commented that there did not seem to be much relating to disease research. PH offered to circulate some details of the projects BBKA had been involved in, and pointed out that a lot of these concerned forage, so they had relevance to other pollinators and not just honey bees.

BP commented that science had been an area where we had struggled to work together. BP had read a very good article in BBKA news about a beekeeper who was monitoring hives using the Arnia system, and felt that that beekeepers participating in such studies and sharing their experiences would fit well with our aim of working together. A question was raised about how useful such studies on technology were. BP's view was that the benefits would only become clear once a project was underway with active input from beekeepers and other users.

MG asked firstly how the new Plan fitted in with Defra's 25-Year Environment Plan. BP felt that there would need to be links between the new Plan and other relevant policy documents including the 25-Year Environment Plan.

Also, in terms of a public relations strategy, whether this would form part of the high level aims, or be covered more in the details of the Plan. BP responded that the aims of the plan were still being developed, hence today's request for comments from the forum, and we'd then work on more detailed plans that consider implementation.

KC asked, since the Plan linked to the National Pollinator Strategy, whether the Welsh strategy could also be included, and BP agreed that it should be included.

RC supported PH's comments on science. At one time there had been a separate sub-committee on science. It was important to look at how to share information more effectively.

NC also supported that view. HBP at one time was perhaps expected to come up with proposals for Varroa controls, but that didn't end up being part of the HBP1.

PH remarked that there was no-one from Bee Diseases Insurance (BDI) on the forum. BDI normally had a PhD being supported at any given time. BP acknowledged this as an issue – consideration was being given to inviting BDI onto the forum. It had to be borne in mind, however, that the size of the forum had to be manageable. NC agreed that it was important that the forum did not become too big, which had happened at times.

BP said an option would be to hold forum meetings focussing on certain aspects of bee health, e.g. science – where not everyone would necessarily attend – just those with a particular interest. There was support from PH and others for this suggestion.

Further comments were welcome, ideally to be received by 30th September. The slides accompanying this item had already been circulated.

MG asked if there was a date set for when the new Plan would be ready.

BP explained that the aim was to co-ordinate with the HBP review, so it was expected by the end of 2019, contingencies permitting.

6. AOB

- (i) Export of apiculture products had been covered at the outset of the meeting – MG had kindly agreed to provide LM with further information.

- (ii) KB explained that at a recent SCoPAFF (EU Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Feed and Food) meeting, a Commission Implementing Decision had been made, with the effect that the prohibition on exports from Sicily will last until 21 April 2021.

This relates to the recent finding of Small hive beetle in Sicily. The onus is now on Italian authorities to show that the safeguard measures could be lifted.

- (iii) Asian hornet – RC had prepared a few slides to summarise 2019 outbreaks.

JP explained that in New Milton, Hampshire, only one individual had been sighted. Surveillance was ongoing but so far nothing had been trapped or sighted.

Near Tamworth, hornets had been spotted in a fruit tree in the garden of a member of the public. An inspector had then observed other hornets flying. Formal identification had been carried out by Fera, although there was certainty that the initial sightings were Asian hornet. A nest was located about 60-65 feet high in a spruce tree. Logistical issues concerning the use of the cherry picker meant that the nest was removed on Friday 6th September. It had proved impossible to cut the nest out because of its high position, and so it had been knocked out of the tree. No sexual stages had been found in the nest, so it had not been producing drones or queens. Surveillance was ongoing to rule out the possibility of a further nest, e.g related primary nest. The Forward Operating Base (FOB) used by inspectors had now been disbanded.

A sighting of a single Asian hornet had been reported on 5th September near Ashford, Kent, in a fairly large fruit farm – it had been foraging on a small cluster of windfall apples. The Regional Bee Inspector had been able to attend the site that same day. Nothing else had been seen initially. Extensive trapping had been taking place on the farm, catching wasps and European hornets but no Asian hornet. These traps were supplemented with NBU traps – again, nothing had been captured other than bycatch. On 6th Sept an Asian hornet had been netted. Since it had been feeding on same cluster of apples, it may have been the same hornet as had been initially spotted. The site is about 15km from the coast. Defra data used for midge/bluetongue work indicated that the wind direction around that time could have contributed to blowing in a hornet from the continent. Initial genetic analysis from Fera is that none of this year's hornets are related to previous years.

PH commented that, in the updates provided by Defra/APHA, it would be useful to have some description of where hornets were sighted, e.g. on fruit, or 60ft up a tree.

Also, information seemed to appear on Facebook before stakeholders received an initial confirmation. BBKA would like to acknowledge on its website that a Facebook report has been made, but could not really do this until confirmation is received.

JP suggested that we could say that a sighting was being investigated. This year, information had been published on gov.uk pretty quickly.

PH added that it was not a criticism, but BBKA will receive criticism if we don't react to reports.

BP felt that BBKA probably had more scope to comment sooner than official government confirmation could be issued.

JP added that it was worth noting that when inspectors talk to a local AHAT co-ordinator, they do provide more specific information about the location. In Ashford, for example, inspectors had been in contact with Sam Day. PH appreciated that NBU was working very hard locally.

BP added that, if BBKA could assist Defra's efforts in managing the social media aspect of Asian hornet coverage, that would be very helpful.

NS added that in Tenterden, Kent, local beekeepers associations had been contacted. NBU alerts, of course, could only be sent to those registered on BeeBase.

BBKA had experienced a delay in issuing a message regarding Tamworth – this had been due to a power outage.

NC asked whether a map of confirmed sightings could be published on gov.uk, with colour coding for the years. PH mentioned that Claire at BBKA was working on a map. NC felt it would be useful for APHA to produce something. BP acknowledged that the list on gov.uk is growing, so it did seem useful to think about how this was presented.

NC mentioned, as an example, the Italian Government's published information on Small hive beetle.

It was a possibility that something could be published on BeeBase, even if it could not be arranged for gov.uk

(iv) Triaging of Asian hornet reports - RC

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology had been looking at all the sightings and e-mail reports – CEH manage the reporting app. They reviewed before forwarding sightings to NBU. There have been fewer reported sightings in the August/September period this year compared with the same period last year. Peaks tended to correspond to media coverage, especially national coverage. It remained the case that most people tended not be aware of the difference between Asian hornet and other species, so there was a lot more that could be done in terms of education campaigns. There were still quite a lot of sightings being sent in without photos.

CEH had advised that the reports received during the week 9th–15th September comprised 92 via the app, 89 via the online form, and 238 e-mails.

PH asked whether any other organisations received this information, e.g. RSPB. It seemed that beekeepers were doing most of the publicity. RC explained that we worked with Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS), who received information at the same time as BHAF. NNSS had a large cohort of stakeholders whom they alerted. Resource issues meant that we had not produced as many articles as we might otherwise have done, but certainly stakeholders had been contacted.

JP commented that his impression was that that there had not been as much media interest this year.

BP said that the gov.uk page had the benefit that it could be updated more quickly than if a press release had to be organised.

JP added that perhaps because news spread on social media and could be picked up by the press, our updates could sometimes feel like old news to much of the media.

LM pointed out that this was now the 4th year of seeing outbreaks, so perhaps inevitably there would be less interest.

BP felt that this emphasised the importance of BBKA's Asian Hornet Week.

No further business was raised. There was agreement that the next meeting should be face-to-face – probably at Nobel House, London – and the most suitable date appeared to be 5th December.

Meeting concluded 12:10
