

Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum

30th Meeting, held at Defra, Nobel House, London

5th December 2019, 11:30 – 15:30

Present (☎ indicates “joined by telephone”)

1	Belinda Phillipson (BP)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
2	Louise Mount (LM)	
3	Kevin Beattie (KB) ☎	
4	Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
5	Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Fera Science Ltd
6	Rebekah Clarkson (BC)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
7	Sandra Gray (SG)	
8	Nigel Semmence (NS)	
9	Julian Parker (JP)	
10	Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government
11	Luis Molero (LMol)	Scottish Government
12	Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers’ Association (BFA)
13	Phoebe Lamb (PL)	
14	Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers’ Association (WBKA)
15	John Bowles (JB)	
16	Pam Hunter (PH) ☎	British Beekeepers’ Association (BBKA)
17	Anne Rowberry (AR)	
18	Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University
19	John Hill (JH)	British Bee Veterinary Association (BBVA)
20	Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping
21	Tom Williamson (TW) ☎	DAERA
22	Louisa Williams (LW) ☎ from 13:15	Defra Wildlife - Pollinator

Apologies received from:

Dan Basterfield Ken Basterfield	National Diploma in Beekeeping
Myles Munro and Anna Burrows	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Rob Nickless	Bee Farmers’ Association (BFA)
Maureen Wakefield	Fera Science Ltd
Fiona Hight MBE	Scottish Government
Chris Hartfield (CH) - confirmed no delegate	National Farmers Union

1. Welcome and introductions – BP 11:30

The Chair welcomed everyone, including new forum member Adam Leitch who had recently been elected as the National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) Chairman and taken over the role from Daniel Basterfield. Alastair Welch, the new NDB Vice-Chair, had sent apologies.

Phoebe Lamb was attending this particular meeting to deliver a presentation on her experiences of successfully completing the Bee Farmers' Association apprenticeship programme.

The Chair explained that there had been an amendment to the order of agenda items.

2. Minutes of 29th meeting; Actions; Q2 Highlight report 2019-20 (RC)

The minutes sent 25/10/2019 were agreed with no comments or amendments.

A discussion took place around the Q2 highlight report:

“D2”: a suggestion was made that, since not all stakeholders were volunteers, the wording could be changed to ‘..majority of stakeholders are **representatives**’.

Risk no. 3: MG pointed out that Apiculture funding is to be increased in the EU by 70% and requested that the risk should acknowledge this.

Risk no. 5: MG highlighted the risk to education funding but recognised that, due to purdah) future policy plans cannot be discussed at this meeting.

3. AOB item 8(a): Query relating to hives that cannot be inspected (KB)

Beekeepers used hives of many different designs. Some were understood to be frameless and so did not allow inspection by the NBU; some were understood to be used by unregistered beekeepers. Defra could not comment on future policy during purdah but requested views from the forum as to how much risk hives of this type and beekeeping of this nature represented.

MG felt strongly that hives of this type being sold in significant numbers should be considered both a disease risk and a risk to pollination contracts, as they were being sold to farmers as a means of pollinating crops. MG had attended the 2019 National Fruit Show and had been concerned that sets of 10 large Box hives were being sold, with the selling point that there would never be any need to attend to them nor look at them. ‘Empty hives’ were likely to pose a serious risk to pollination. BFA’s intention was to have a strong presence at the 2020 National Fruit Show.

Other forum members had also seen box hives being sold, e.g. at a County Show. ‘Box hives’ including hollow logs or similar cavities were understood to be illegal in Australia. It could be useful to understand how the Australian authorities monitor this.

Questions were raised as to whether there was any evidence that bees occupy these boxes; what the occupancy rates were; whether the volume of sales of box hives presented a risk; whether fruit growers believed that bees would be attracted to box hives.

In Northern Ireland box hives had been encountered within forested areas which were almost impossible to inspect. It had not been clear whether the boxes were to aid pollination or just to provide sites for bees. There were no legal powers to ask a beekeeper to remove hives: a request could only be made to carry out an inspection.

In England & Wales there was awareness of unregistered log hives but these hives had not yet been inspected. In Scotland there had been a complaint about a Scottish Natural Heritage site where bees were being kept in skeps.

A suggestion was made that a representative of “natural beekeepers” could attend the BHAF. This could be considered under the new Healthy Bees Plan. It had to be borne in mind, however, that there were at least 3 distinct groups of Natural Beekeepers.

The general consensus was that box hives were not a good idea and presented a disease risk. There could perhaps be a role for the forum to educate farmers on this issue.

As to whether rules could be tightened to allow inspection of box hives that did present a disease risk, NBU must suspect disease in order to use its powers of entry. The term “Natural beekeeping” covered a range of hives and approaches to beekeeping: Golden hives, Sun hives and Warre hives are inspectable. Many natural beekeepers have worked with NBU, but logs and boxes are different. An inspection must be justified, especially if it would destroy the structure of the hive.

NBU would be concerned about ‘10 boxes in a field’ in a zone of high risk, and would endeavour to inspect. It appeared that many people would unwittingly buy the hives and simply not understand the risk of disease they may create.

It could be useful to revisit this discussion regarding possible future action.

4. Presentation – BFA apprenticeship programme

Phoebe Lamb, one of the BFA’s apprentices, delivered a presentation about her experiences of the apprenticeship programme.

Phoebe, a Journalism graduate, had begun her apprenticeship aged 24 in 2015, as part of the 2nd cohort of apprentices. She was supported by both her parents, who at the outset of her apprenticeship managed 75 hives, and also by Freedom Brewery.

The programme had been well-designed, especially the microscopy and learning elements. There was lots of support: every three months a week of training took place and between blocks of training, tutors were available and bee farmers provided mentoring for the apprentices.

The highlight of the apprenticeship had been a trip to NZ during their summer. Phoebe had spent three weeks processing honey on a farm with 20,000 colonies. The most memorable part of this visit had been flying hives by helicopter into the volcanic Manuka hills. When working on such a large scale, however, some of the risks are supersized, e.g. palletising bees creates supercolonies of Varroa.

The placement in New Zealand had also provided Phoebe with valuable knowledge about rearing queens, which she was now putting into practice back in the UK. Between 2015 and 2019 the number of colonies managed at her parents' farm had more than doubled to 200.

The apprenticeship had proved to be a good platform to learn many life skills, e.g. modules in first aid, communication, business plans and marketing. For her project Phoebe had chosen to develop courses for beginners and intermediate beekeepers.

All of the curriculum had been available on the e-learning platform 'One file', so all the outcomes had been available to review and update online using a personal profile.

Phoebe had received her diploma with distinction in 'Excellence in Bee Farming' at the Wax Chandler's Hall.

Phoebe concluded by taking questions from the forum and the Chair thanked her for a very interesting and engaging presentation.

5. Lunch

6. Asian Hornet Update

NS delivered a presentation focussing on the 2019 contingency response.

A discussion followed, which included the following points:

- It seemed Asian hornet had now become established on Jersey. Not much genetic analysis had been done there.
- The practice on Jersey was to leave bait stations in place; Jersey has moved away from bagging nests, partly because of stings. Also, for nests high in trees, moving a cherry picker in alerted the hornets.
- Jersey had also stopped using CO₂; the current approach was to clear the site around the nest, let it settle and destroy after 24hrs. All processes have cost implications.
- AR had visited Jersey: all dissected nests she had seen contained queens. AR had observed that the sound of an angry Asian hornet is different to a European hornet.
- Protein baits, e.g. prawns, helped with obtaining sight lines. Hornets less likely to feed compared with carbohydrate baits: they processed protein and flew back to the nest.

- NBU had sought medical advice regarding the risks associated with stings. APHA had invested in thicker bee suits for Asian hornet work. Guidance on the risks of lone working was similar to that for anaphylaxis, so lone working is not recommended. It was important to exercise caution and be prepared to retreat from a nest.
- Arrangements would be made for inspectors to be issued with factsheets on stings. The effect of an Asian hornet sting on an individual person, whether single or multiple stings, was unpredictable.
- There was a public health, as well as a beekeeping, aspect to Asian hornet. The Spanish province of Galicia initially had 4 nests: this had risen to 10,600 within a few years. A death had occurred in Galicia: the person had been strimming a hedge.
- Jersey had found that each nest dealt with required 200 hours of resources. To optimise use of resources and determine whether a sighting is a single hornet, it was important to investigate and ask questions. Local AHATs, householders, etc. were asked to be vigilant even in cases of single sightings.
- In Jersey, members of the public are permitted to use the “track and trace” method as there are no bee inspectors. In the UK, as Asian hornet is an invasive species, NBU inspectors have a licence exempting them from the prohibition on releasing hornets.
- Each of the Channel Islands has had a nest in 2018. Guernsey operated a spring trapping programme, although this approach raised concerns about by-catch.

Action 1: NS’ presentation to be circulated among forum members.

7. Update on the Healthy Bees Plan Review

BP thanked forum members for their contributions to the review, which was now about two-thirds complete.

A timeline of key events during the course of the plan had been produced. The HBP did not occur in isolation, so it seemed useful to reflect this as part of the review.

Action 2: forum members to please send any additional key dates that seem to warrant inclusion in the HBP timeline, by the end of January.

8. AOB/comms/news 14:30

The AOB item on hives which cannot be inspected was covered earlier (see page 2)

8(a) [European Bee award applications](#) (Rebekah Clarkson)

JH advised that a BBVA member had applied and had not been successful but received feedback and will be trying again in future. It would be useful if any feedback can be shared, as this could help encourage UK entries in 2020.

8(b) [Apimondia 2019](#) (Fera)

KS delivered a presentation about her visit to Apimondia 2019, Montréal, Canada.

Action 3: KS' synopsis to be shared among forum members.

8(c) [Hive Count](#) (Frank Petherbridge)

Forum members were invited to encourage colleagues and members to update their details for the hive count which would be closing on 31/12/2019. So far over 8,000 people had submitted their numbers, which represents a significant increase on previous years.

There remained a concern that the hive count sample could be skewed if, for example, newer beekeepers are more likely to respond to an email request.

Action 4: all please to encourage colleagues/members to update their details on BeeBase for the hive count.

8(d) [BHAF Expense claims](#) (Rebekah Clarkson)

Expenses have taken a number of months to process, and RC thanked everyone for their patience.

8(e) [Date of next meeting](#)

Tentative Feb/March, venue and room to be confirmed. The possibility of an earlier catch up to discuss the review was raised.

Meeting closed 15:30