

Minutes of the Bee Health Advisory Forum 33rd Meeting

10th September 2020, 10:30 – 13:00 (Zoom conference)

In attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Kevin Beattie (KB)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP) - minutes	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Louisa Willows (LWs)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Mairi Carnegie (MC)	SASA – Scottish Government
Luis Molero (LMol)	Scottish Government
Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Pam Hunter (PH)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University and National Diploma in Beekeeping
John Hill (JH)	British Bee Veterinary Association (BBVA)
Leyland Walker (LW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tom Williamson (TW)	
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)

Apologies received from:

Maureen Wakefield (MW)	Fera Science Ltd.
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union
Sandra Gray (SG)	National Bee Unit
Nigel Semmence (NS)	

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. MC had attended for Scottish Government as LMol was not able to dial in from the start of the meeting.

2. Q1 Highlight Report 2020-21 (RC)

No suggestions had been received as yet from the forum members regarding forum membership. Please note that there is still time to send any suggestions to Becky.

The action for Bee Health Policy to inform BFA of any developments around seasonal worker availability for the bee farming sector could be closed – currently no further developments.

The Highlight Report had been updated: this mainly involved removal of some risks which had appeared out of date or which had now been recorded as issues. There were no comments on the Highlight Report.

3. HBP2030, Implementation plan and timelines (BP)

Defra ministerial approval for publication of the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 had been obtained. The plan was being refined based on comments received during the recent exercise involving PASG and APPT.

The remaining steps prior to publication included translation into Welsh and approval by the relevant Welsh Government Minister. Translation of the Review of the original plan was already underway.

HBP 2030 Implementation Plan – a productive BHAF meeting had been held on 13th August. Progress had been made towards arriving at a suitable format and the plan would take shape over the next six months.

4. Preparation for end of transition period

The UK left the EU earlier this year. The current transitional period will end on 31 December 2020. Trade negotiations between the UK and the EU are ongoing.

It is possible that a trade deal won't be reached with the EU in which case the UK may only be able to trade as a third country under WTO rules.

Up to date information can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/transition>

For Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Protocol would apply. LW agreed there were still a lot of unknowns at this stage.

LMol asked about the Animal Health Law. This was due to come into force in the EU from 21st April 2021. LM confirmed there was no requirement for the UK to implement it, and beekeepers would be consulted if the UK did intend to implement aspects of it.

All 4 Devolved Administrations have had the same rules in place now for 40 years while the UK has been in the EU. A framework for how DAs would work together in future was being developed and there would be an element of stakeholder consultation in relation to that.

ACTION 33.1 – Bee Health Policy Team to circulate notes on this topic.

As the meeting was running ahead of schedule, part of Item 6 was covered before the scheduled break.

Asian hornet – outbreak in Hampshire (JP)

A sighting reported recently from Southampton had been investigated and appeared to have been a lone individual.

Gosport, Hampshire – surveillance had been extended to include two other apiaries; lots of hornets were being seen; special Asian hornet suits were being worn, which were attracting a bit more attention from the public. The full outbreak response had been initiated 9th September.

The various initial sightings in the Gosport area had been treated as one incident. Asian hornet teams had been notified based on the initial sighting. AR had a concern that AHTs had not been specifically informed about flying hornets being seen. NBU would review to see if any agreed trigger points had been missed.

Channel Islands situation: AR had received an update last week, that 39 nests had been found on Jersey (relatively low compared to previous years) and only 3 queens had been found on Guernsey.

NC referred to a paper by French researchers looking at the economic cost of control of Asian hornet, which included information on the potential range of Asian hornet within Europe.

Links: <https://neobiota.pensoft.net/article/38550/>
<https://neobiota.pensoft.net/article/38550/zoom/fig/12/>

BP added that the UK is not complacent about Asian hornet but it is up to other countries what action they take.

PH – BBKA had provided funds towards a project looking at Asian hornet diet. University of Exeter researchers had been collecting hornets and larvae from nests. AR added that there is also ongoing work on trialling more lightweight tags, but the work has been impacted by COVID-19.

5. Break - 11:40 – 11:55

6. Asian hornet – triage numbers (RC); Asian Hornet Week (AR)

RC delivered a slide presentation on the triaging work to assess reports of suspected sightings.



Asian Hornet Triage
2020.pptx

Defra policy had been working with press office colleagues to correct erroneous press reports.

There had been >500 views (around 2,000 hits) on the BBKA website.

WBKA would be hosting a webinar soon that could accommodate 500 people, so it would be open to anyone to attend.

Asian Hornet Week (7th-13th September) had been going very well. There had been some interest in local press and an article had appeared in an allotment association magazine. Market stalls were also involved in some awareness raising work this year.

There had been lots of interest on social media and in terms of the number of visits to the BBKA website. BBKA Youtube videos had proved very popular and there was a BBKA photo competition underway asking people to send in photos of wasp nests. The Asian hornet Watch App seemed to be very popular.

Preserved specimens of AH were being sent out to local team leaders so that they could show people what Asian hornet looks like.

Peter Kennedy had provided an update on his hornet tracking work. Xesus Feas, whose work focussed on the impact of Asian hornet in Spain, had highlighted that AH can be found in urban as well as rural environments; he has been looking at the diet of Asian hornet, and carrying out work on pheromones.

It would be useful to review Asian Hornet Week by working with NBU to consider how the event could be improved in future.

LMol was aware that, in Scotland, some comms had been issued via SASA, but was not sure if there had been any comms involving the Scottish Beekeepers Association.

AR confirmed that BBKA members in Scotland had been notified but agreed it would be useful for more partnership working to take place around Asian Hornet Week.

AOB

Scheduled items:

1. Beekeeper registration (AR)

It was important to know how many beekeepers were in an area and how they were operating. Beekeepers manage their bees in very different ways, and should be required to register as a minimum, so that it was at least easy to contact them if necessary. AR would be happy for this topic to be discussed at a future forum.

MG – BFA have always been in favour of mandatory registration.

BBKA had not put this position to its whole membership, but there seemed to be a lot of support for the idea within its membership.

WS confirmed that WBKA hadn't ever voted on the issue, but was personally in favour, so long as the database was useful. In New Zealand, which operated a policy a mandatory registration, an estimated 20% of beekeepers were not registered and there were quite a number of AFB outbreaks there.

BP – this issue could be considered under the Implementation Plan; there were various approaches that could be taken.

AR added that it was certainly important to impress upon beekeepers the importance of being on BeeBase.

2. Adulterated honey (AR)

It was likely that this problem only applied in a small proportion of cases. It could become more of a cause for concern, depending on what trade terms the UK could negotiate. Perhaps more information and encouragement could be directed to beekeepers to encourage reporting of any concerns about products. One aspect was whether there were sufficient lab testing resources.

There was also an issue with some beekeepers feeding bees while supers are on the hives. It could be useful to disseminate information to beekeepers on what they should and should not be feeding.

WS was aware of a suspected case that was reported but no prosecution resulted. Some beekeepers fed sugar quite freely.

BFA's approach was to call in Trading Standards if there was a suspicion that honey was being adulterated.

The issue had also been raised at Apimondia. The responsibility lies with honey packers and importers – the relevant industry body in the UK is the Honey Association.

JP – honey packers had a Code of Practice and would generally test any imported honey for residues, e.g. of medicines. Honey was regulated by various bodies: Food Standards Agency; Defra; Trading Standards. VMD were involved in residue testing – NBU inspectors collect samples for that testing programme. Action had been taken against a beekeeper last year where residues of an illegal substance were found.

BP – while the issue was of interest it was probably not appropriate for BHAF to become involved.

Other items:

1. JH explained that there was interest within the veterinary profession on the potential for environmental pollution arising from the much increased use of insecticides, e.g. Imidacloprid, on cats and dogs to control fleas. These products had previously been used as treatments but were now being used prophylactically.

A PhD project was being carried out on this topic at the University of Sussex. A Buglife survey on river pollution had highlighted the issue. BP agreed it was good to be aware of such issues, although it was not something that BHAF could focus on particularly.

2. NC advised that the COLOSS study on the effect of COVID-19 on bee research that he had mentioned at the last meeting had now been published:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00218839.2020.1799646>

Meeting closed. Date of next meeting: Thursday, 3rd December.