

BEE HEALTH ADVISORY FORUM (Bhaf)
39th MEETING – Thursday, 3rd March 2022
MS Teams
10:30 – 13:00

Attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Dhonn Atkinson	
Nigel Semmence	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Alison Knox	Scottish Government
Claire Gill	
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Jane Medwell	
Norman Carreck (NC)	Science Advisor – Sussex University
Giles Budge (GB)	Science Advisor – Newcastle University
Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Science Advisor – Pirbright Institute
Rob Nickless (RN)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Heard (JH)	
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)
Ian Fenn	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy

Apologies received from:

Louise Mount (LM)	(Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.
Maureen Wakefield (MW)	

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone. Minutes of 38th meeting had been published in November following email agreement. RC began the automatic transcription after attendees gave consent for the recording.

2 Asian Hornet Update

BP introduced NS who gave a detailed update of the 2021 Asian Hornet outbreaks. Key points covered included:

- England and Wales continue to be in an eradication phase
- Contingency plans and the NBU's scalable responses.
- Internal Emergency Readiness Management Assurance Scheme (ERMAS) audit.
- Detailed summary of last year's outbreaks in Ascot and Portsmouth. Finding the nest in Portsmouth took longer because of bad weather and insects were not flying. Portsmouth was at the stage of producing queens, but the nest was small and extremely inbred with several hornets found to be triploid. BeeBase will be updated with results of analysis of the nests.
- How the NBU review each contingency response and record lessons identified to continuously improve
- Improvements to our track and trace process include an App. for Inspectors to record photos, lines of sight and comments in real time onto an ArcGIS map together with uniquely barcoded monitoring traps.
- Enhanced surveillance in the Portsmouth area. We plan to monitor using monitoring traps rather than killing 'traps' and will release native insects to reduce bycatch losses.
- NBU planning training for the Inspectorate in track and trace and running an incident for both incident commander and sector commanders, to ensure awareness of the updated operating procedures (SOPs).
- Awareness talks being scheduled in the areas at risk, especially around Portsmouth.

NS showed an image of the UK which estimates the climate suitability of the yellow-legged hornet predicted from species distribution modelling, (Barbet-Massin *et al.* 2020).

Barbet-Massin, Morgane & Salles, Jean-Michel & Courchamp, Franck. (2020). The economic cost of control of the invasive yellow-legged Asian hornet. *NeoBiota*. 55. 11-25. 10.3897/neobiota.55.38550. available online:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340427352_The_economic_cost_of_control_of_the_invasive_yellow-legged_Asian_hornet#pf7

Prior to questions BP invited the attendees to do a round table of introductions for the benefit of new members.

AL asked, 'How related are the nests?'

NS explained that whilst there are limitations to the analysis, none of the nests found to date are related to nests from previous years. There is not very much variation at all as all have been related to the French incursion.

JB enquired, 'The nest was found west of central England. Has there been publicity done with yacht clubs etc?'

NS explained that publicity is and has been key to our approach since before the first incursion in 2016. We share this between Defra, Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) and NBU. The NBU focusing on beekeepers, and we have also done a lot of work with pest controllers.

BP: AH is a good hitchhiker.

GB: Is there any evidence that the AH queen mated in the UK?

NS: There is no sure way of proving that.

GB: One of the things you can say when the population is small is whether alleles from drones have been detected in the UK before.

NS: We may not have detected all the drones that could have been in the UK, so we cannot rule that out. We can say all the alleles tested in the UK have come from or are present in the French population. GB offered to send his more detailed question over email.

KS: The gynes – can you test the spermatozoa to see if they had mated?

NS: We have no reason to believe the queens had left the nest. Only a selection of hornets were analysed and those they looked at there was no evidence of mating.

AR: In the Ascot nest all the hornets that were analysed did not have fat bodies. Is the expectation that workers in an Asian hornet nest will not have any fat bodies?

NS: AH workers do have smaller, limited fat bodies, but they are much smaller than those found in a queen as they do not overwinter.

AR: I am pleased to see the plan that you have drawn up. It is very clear and it is extremely helpful.

My concern is it is an annual plan. I know that NBU continually improve on what happens the previous year and you have financial constraints. My concern is that one year ahead is not far to plan for what could be quite a large incursion, especially as the constraints of the pandemic are reduced and traffic resumes between the UK and the continent, or we get a particularly good year which encourages breeding in Normandy or somewhere and hornets come across (the channel). It would be good to see a plan that stretched a little further than one year, that showed how you were going to finance the destruction of a lot of nests or cope with a larger number of incursions. Do you work with local authorities and other groups like that to try and see whether there are and wider plans?

I am quite concerned that we have been extremely fortunate so far. It might be to do with genetics. I do not know what is happening with the breeding on the continent, but our theory is that we will see more AH coming in when the conditions are right.

NS: We all share your fears, but we have no evidence of that now. NBU has improved our efficiency and could deal with 20- 30 outbreaks in a season. We have done a lot of training over the past three years with pest controllers, so they are fully informed for the time we change from the eradication phase.

BP: You cannot model every single scenario. The NBU operation has become so slick over the past five years that it is really working very well at present. We are lucky as it is not established, and the lifecycle allows us to review the evidence during the winter. We too have concerns but there is not any hard evidence for us to look at the longer term.

AP: Thank you. I do not wish to criticise the response to the Asian Hornet in any way, I think they have been very efficient, and it is worked well, your responses have got faster over the years as we have learned more.

I was quite horrified recently to find a reporter I was speaking to yesterday, who had never heard of Asian Hornets. Quite a lot of people in the street I spoke to after that had never heard of Asian Hornets too. I do think there needs to be a huge push to inform the public, which of course the BBKA will support.

I do think it would be helpful to have an outline plan for longer than just one year which could obviously be adjusted in line with current evidence. I'm concerned that it takes a long time to get people on board.

BP we are not able to produce a plan for more than 1 year as we don't know what we are planning for.

NS confirmed that NBU is ready to deal with more outbreaks and thanked the BHAF and especially the BBKA and WBKA for raising awareness. The work of the BBKA AHT's are crucial in raising local awareness, especially in high-risk areas.

BP, we don't have a five-year plan but that does not mean we are unprepared.

GB, you mentioned that the Asian Hornet behaviours are sometimes difficult to predict. One thing we can say is that it does continue to build and build and become a problem to both beekeeping

and other pollinators. What is great is seeing the fantastic tools that you have developed to manage outbreaks in real time that help you to find things very quickly.

You can use information from papers modelling the spread of Asian Hornet to compare with doing nothing, in ten years with no action we would be looking at about 60,000 nests across England and Wales. As we are obviously nowhere near that now, comparing what you are doing now to having done nothing could be an effective way to estimate a cost benefit which could be useful way to capture as an output of the HBP 2030?

NS: The NNSS and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology are working on papers which include cost benefit analysis, but there is always a delay before publication.

Comfort break

3 Healthy Bees Plan 2030 (HBP 2030) Implementation

RC gave a brief update to highlight the progress made on 25 actions over the four themes and 55 actions of HBP 2030.

It is important to remember the context: that it has been a challenging couple of years, with enormous amounts of uncertainty and that we took an aspirational approach when drafting the HBP 2030's implementation plan.

We have reviewed BHAF membership, and held our first science meeting, but any thoughts are welcome. For example, the idea of themed agendas for BHAF meetings has come up before, i.e., focussing on a particular topic from time to time, so perhaps more could be done there.

The Forum was invited to share their views on their progress and asked for feedback on the timings and format of implementation plan updated BHAF meetings be useful? No feedback has been received so far from forum members. The Forum was invited to discuss details of what the actions entailed, and to review the actions they were involved in. Ideas would be welcome on a format for how work on the actions and how everyone would want to take this forward to reach a collective understanding of how things are progressing. Would it be useful to have binary updates on actions, i.e., Completed/Not completed, or could it be useful to have a more detailed commentary?

HBP education procurement

For the current competition, the review of the original HBP had been considered, along with the findings from the ICF social science study, and the core education topics that had been discussed by the forum. The contracts would run for the next two financial years, until March 2024.

BP – we are starting to go through the actions in more detail now. Would it make sense to discuss certain actions separately, organisation by organisation?

JH – Discussing actions separately makes sense and would be a more measured way of understanding all the interests represented on the BHAF.

AR favoured a blended approach. It would be useful to meet all together, at least some of the time, to check in and see what progress is being made. Could more information be provided on the education contract tendering – what exactly was required?

RC emphasised that collaborations between potential providers were welcome, but it was not appropriate to offer additional information to forum members as this could be seen as offering unfair advantage. It was necessary to register on Bravo and post any questions through the portal so that other interested parties could see the questions and answers.

Regarding the implementation plan actions, one option would be to report on progress action by action or theme by theme. Again, I welcome your ideas. For example, it would be good to understand if there are any actions that you would like to work on together in a focussed BHAF meeting.

AR: it would be important to take account of busy times during the season. BBKA were introducing lots of courses this year. Perhaps reporting could be done annually rather than waiting until the three-year review point?

BP agreed that there was value in the whole group meeting, but it would be difficult to manage if that were the only approach used.

World Bee Day on 20th May - could science be promoted through BHAF communications for World Bee Day (as per action 33)?

AL - it would be good to aim to produce something for World Bee Day - various publications would be looking for source material for that day.

AR – BBKA plan to produce world Bee Day communications. Themes include pollinators and the benefits of local honey in the context of BBKA's current work to combat adulterated honey.

Action 1. RC to arrange meetings with members to discuss their actions in the implementation plan.

4 AOB/comms/news

4.1 BBKA Honey Labelling issues (AR)

BBKA wish to tackle the issue of honey labelling. We want to change it because now we're out of the EU, UK honey is 'non-EU honey.' We would like honey which is imported to state which countries contribute, and the percentage. This would give consumers more information and allow them to choose about what is in the jar they purchase.

BP thanked AR for the update.

4.2 Future Forum meeting dates:

BP explained that she was not available to chair on the scheduled date of the 40th Forum.

The Forum agreed to move the date. RN personally thanked BP for her chairing and said the BFA would be happy to nudge the meeting to ensure the consistency of the meeting moving forward. The Forum agreed to move the date.

Action 2: RC to send an email to the Forum to agree on future dates.

AR asked if any physical meetings were planned. BP explained that Government buildings are still very restricted, particularly in London. RN asked for in season meetings to be virtual. AR offered the BBKA's room in Stoneleigh for a blended meeting.

Future Forum meeting dates:

No	Dates/info	Location
40	TBC Quarter 1 April - June	Virtual - MS Teams
41	TBC Quarter 2 July - September	Virtual - MS Teams
42	TBC Quarter 3 October - December	Stoneleigh