

BEE HEALTH ADVISORY FORUM (BHAF)
41st MEETING – Thursday, 8th September 2022
MS Teams
10:30 – 12:30

Attendance

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Louise Mount (LM)	
Shaun Cook (SC)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Nigel Semmence (NS)	
Paul Simpson (PS)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Rob Nickless (RN)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Science Advisor – Sussex University
Giles Budge (GB)	Science Advisor – Newcastle University
Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Science Advisor
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.

Apologies received from:

Dhonn Atkinson	National Bee Unit (NBU)
John Heard	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Jane Medwell (JM)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Raluca Herascu	Scottish Government
Luis Molero	
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive

1. Welcome and introductions

The online meeting started at 10:15 and the meeting began at 10:35.

Maureen Wakefield has moved on to another position at Fera so Ben Jones who is the lead Bee Health scientist at Fera and will cover all bee health matters. BP thanked Maureen Wakefield for her contribution to the Forum.

Minutes of the 40th meeting had been agreed via email correspondence. MS and SC reported issues with links on BeeBase.

Action 1: RC to check the BeeBase links for the Terms of Reference and the Minutes and ensure these are fixed if required

Review of outstanding Actions:

Action 40-1 (CH to update the 'Farming for bees' leaflet with the feedback received and bring back to the Forum) postponed until a later meeting.

Action 40-2 (BBKA/WBKA to ask associations for mentoring experiences and send case studies by the end of September). This promoted further discussion

MS updated the Forum that he had discussed mentoring with several associations, who were not generally offering to mentor beekeepers. They believed that mentoring (as set out in July's paper) does not really work unless it is 1:1. They felt it is resource intensive. If mentoring is offered, it is generally a paid process in their experience. It also would reduce the people available for association training. Associations prefer to provide support to more new beekeepers via training programmes. MS was concerned that diverging education routes; 1:1 or classes (which both use the same restricted pool of educators) could reduce the amount of education available to beekeepers.

WS felt differently as WBKA have other ways of mentoring. People who are still beginners do most of the mentoring. Through the process of mentoring people learn a great deal and it has the benefit of creating lasting bee-buddies.

BP proposed to reflect on the different perceptions of mentoring described and that the Bee Health Policy team would follow up on this action later in September.

Action 40-3 (Transfer association membership data (er2)). This action has been completed.

2. HBP 2030 Implementation Plan update

This agenda item had been set to discuss 4 of the actions from the Implementation Plan: actions 44 - promoting mentoring, 45 - diversity, 49 - BeeConnected and 50 - Championing the Farmed environment. However CH was not able to attend this meeting so this item has been postponed until the next meeting so CH can lead the discussions.

RC described how several of the actions in the Implementation Plan are collaborative and therefore don't have a 'lead'. RC is attempting to find a simple way to amalgamate multiple people's updates on common actions.

Action 2: RC to send out a bespoke table of actions for each Forum member which they can then update ready for review at the next meeting.

The Forum were invited to highlight progress of their HBP Implementation plan actions however no comments were received

3. Apiculture Programme

LM presented options for 2023/24, she gave some background as to how the funding was allocated now that this has been transposed into UK law. This is a devolved area, so each Administration has its own arrangement and will bid for money separately. England and Wales were committed to a joint plan in terms of actions. The hive count was to be retained as it provides a valuable annual snapshot of the number of hives in the UK but funding was not dependent on hive numbers.

MS asked if Defra was under increased funding pressure with budgets if hive numbers and the budget are not linked in law. He also asked what the beekeeping community can do to help to ensure apiculture money is spent on bees.

LM acknowledged that it was a time of constrained funding, and all departments must justify budgets. BHP must clearly describe the value of the investment in the bee health programme.

BP thanked MS for the question and explained how participation in the hive count provides adequate justification for the funding.

WS asked what proportion of beekeepers do the hive count survey. He was concerned that this was the same respondents every year and this may be causing bias in the data. BP noted WBKA's concerns. FP confirmed it was a low but growing proportion of beekeepers who took part in the count. WS agreed to speak to KC about options for improving Welsh data after the meeting.

KC clarified that WG apiculture funding is now provided by WG rather than HM Treasury. The WG is committed to maintaining investment in Bee health.

The next programme:

LM proposed that the 23/24 programme should be based on 2 of the measures – 'Technical Assistance' and 'Combatting Hive Invaders' She reminded the BHAF of the other 6 measures.

Action 3: Attendees are to consider the apiculture programme measures and provide any feedback to BHP by the end of October so that it can be used in decision making for the next programme.

Options for technical assistance to beekeepers

LM described three options for technical assistance to beekeepers.

MS felt that the budget should focus on option 1) Bee Inspector led training. AR agreed, adding that online information is good, but the NBU's Inspector teaching is highly valuable. WS also agreed and noted that the WBKA were having a bee health day the following weekend.

GB asked if the online courses which are an element of the 'Technical Assistance' measure include the advisory leaflets the NBU produces. GB described when he met people in other countries, he was always amazed at the high regard that NBU leaflets/literature are held. BHP confirmed that while these leaflets form a part of the BeeBase provision, they are not part of this funding measure.

AL reflected that all inspector led events are valuable- especially diseased comb workshops.

Options for combatting hive invaders

LM covered the 3 options for combatting hive invaders. AR believed that a big issue in 2022 was having enough Inspectors to inspect disease. BBKA would be concerned with any option that reduced the number of inspections. RN also expressed concern if the current inspection programme was reduced (options 2 &3).

MS added that extra time spent on advisory elements takes inspector time away from other work (Option 3). He asked if the whole apiary shook-swarm research had been factored in for options 2 & 3.

GB emphasised that inspections are vital, the range of information passed over during an inspection is invaluable and provides a similar benefit as mentoring.

LM thanked everyone for their input and reflected how it was heartening to hear how much the Forum valued NBU's Inspectorate's activities.

Action 4: RC to circulate the apiculture slides and market survey to BHAF attendees after the meeting.

4. Asian Hornet update

Nigel Semmence provided an update on 2022 sightings (of which there had been two), data from last year and improvements made this year. He confirmed future Asian hornet nests are to be destroyed using Vulcan P5 and how BBKA's Asian hornet teams are critical to contingency responses through their surveillance efforts.

NS thanked the Forum for participating in the BBKA's Asian hornet week and for encouraging members to report sightings using the free Asian Hornet Watch app for [iPhone](#) or [Android](#) or the [online reporting form](#).

5. Science Advisor Update

This is a new regular item for the Forum where the Science Advisors are invited to bring a key research paper they feel is of note to the Forum. NC selected Verdasca *et al.* (2021). The paper shows how dispersal of Asian hornet is facilitated by motorways. The paper makes the suggestion that during a contingency response the buffer zones need to be enlarged near motorways.

KS highlighted that the paper acknowledged that there may be biases as it is self-reported data. In future studies cultural differences and population density should be factors to consider as they will influence the rate of reporting.

NS: There is a link between this paper and the 2022 AH sighting as a railway line goes direct from Felixstowe with regular freight trains.

BP thanked Norman for an interesting choice of paper. She reminded the Science Advisors of the offer to bring papers to the next meeting for discussion.

6. Future Meetings

RC proposed holding the next meeting of the Forum in person and invited the attendees to fill out a poll on this. The majority were in favour.

Action 5: RC to organise a face to face meeting at BBKA's head office in Stoneleigh.

BP outlined plans to agree the date and format of the 2023 science meeting.

GB suggested themes could be decided prior to the meeting. This would then focus discussions on the key issues.

KS added it would be good know what Forum members want to hear about to shape discussions.

MS added that BDI/BBKA/CB Dennis is currently offering funding for bee health research which RC agreed to share with the forum.

Action 6: RC to agree a convenient date in February for the science meeting.

Action 7: RC to send out the list of science projects for BHAF members to review and update by the middle of November.

Action 8: RC to share the funding opportunity from BDI/BBKA/CB to Forum members.

7. AOB/comms/news

7.1 NC asked for more information about the [interception at Dover](#). JP advised a small consignment of queens imported from Poland were intercepted by UK Border Force as they arrived via a known courier. The consignment was seized, destroyed under the [TARP](#) regulations and the beekeeper contacted. We will not provide any further detail that could potentially identify an individual.

7.2. AR updated the Forum on the BBKA's new '[National Honey Day](#)' 21/10/2022, which is just before the National Honey Show.

7.3 KS asked for guidance on the Varroa treatment 'Formic Pro'. Online 'Formic Pro' guidance is different to its leaflet i.e., it cannot be used with honey supers. KS enquired if this was being challenged. TK advised VMD do not normally share any details of ongoing veterinary medicine applications but was not aware of this issue.

7.4 RN described how BFA are seeing high levels of Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV) and asked GB for his assessment. GB confirmed that going by the amount of correspondence he had received for his research project involving CBPV, there is lots of virus about and its incidence does appear to have increased. Newcastle (University) is having no problem finding samples. JP offered to poll NBU inspectors.

BP reflected that we need to keep track of the risk CBPV poses.

8. Meeting closed 12:25.

References

Verdasca MJ, Rebelo H, Carvalheiro LG, Rebelo R (2021) Invasive hornets on the road: motorway-driven dispersal must be considered in management plans of *Vespa velutina*. *NeoBiota* 69: 177-198.