

Bee Health Advisory Forum 35th Meeting
25th February 2021, 10:30 – 13:00 (Zoom conference)

In attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Louise Mount (LM)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Louisa Willows (LWs)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Maureen Wakefield (MW)	Fera Science Ltd.
Victoria Tomkies	
Luis Molero	Scottish Government
Linsey Watt	
Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS) John Bowles (JB)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
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)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union
Martin Smith	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)

Apologies received from:

Kevin Beattie (KB)	Defra bee health policy - on secondment.
Pam Hunter (PH)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Alison Knox	Scottish Government

1. Welcome and introductions

BP welcomed all to the 35th meeting. Minutes to the December meeting had been agreed over email and [published on BeeBase](#) in January.

Martin Smith of Bee Disease Insurance (BDI), joined the Forum for the first time, he previously represented BBKA during the original HBP. LM from the Scottish Policy team announced two new colleagues had been recruited; Linsey Watt and Alison Knox, who was on annual leave.

2. Q1 Highlight Report 2020-21

RC had circulated the quarterly highlight report prior to the meeting and no comments were made. Successes over Q3 included the publication of the Healthy Bees Plan review and the Healthy Bees plan 2030 in English and Welsh and the procurement of the social science project looking at beekeeper churn and education materials.

RC updated the Forum on the four outstanding actions: -

- I. No further highlight format ideas had been forwarded. RC suggested the format of the report may naturally change as the implementation plan progresses - action closed.
- II. A 'medicine risks agenda item' following an AOB on (Fiprinol) had not yet been arranged - action remains open
- III. RC thanked everyone for 'encouraging members to respond to the hive count' as the highest ever response rate had been recorded - action closed.
- IV. BDI were invited and present - action closed.

MS asked whether BDI's proposal to work with NBU to use currently insured beekeeper details to cleanse BeeBase should be discussed as an action. RC confirmed it would be helpful for BDI to define this work as part of the implementation plan.

3. Transition Louise Mount 10:45 Update/ discussion

LM presented slides and explained that there is little new news following the end of the transition period on 31st December. LM reminded Forum members of the transitional changes to trade and reflected how we are all on a journey and things are changing quickly. The slides included a process map, which is due to be published in a Bee Farmer magazine article and uploaded onto BeeBase shortly.

Bee Health Policy confirmed they would continue to keep the Forum updated. LM confirmed model certificates are available for 'queen bees' other types of import are not permitted since the UK's exit from the EU

The Cabinet Office and HMRC has published the border operating model.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-border-operating-model>

BP explained how packages [of bees] must have a health certificate to be moved into Ireland. BHP are working with colleagues in NI and with the legislation currently in place. LM explained that bee health is a devolved matter- and we work closely with our colleagues and noted the concerns raised by the Forum.

MS: The risk of SHB being imported [from Europe] is a significant risk bee health in the UK. Once the import of Small Hive beetle has happened there is nothing that can be done. MS offered to draft a paragraph to ensure the Forum's views were heard.

BP highlighted that any paragraph may not reflect the views of the entire forum.

LM stated how the policy for unfettered market access is not the remit of Bee health policy. Information is available and HMRC enforce this area.

AR confirmed BBKA want to raise a petition [regarding imports] and plan to take to parliament as another route.

JH offered assistance and explained as Chairman of Ulster Beekeepers' Association he has sent a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, MP's, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Ministers in Southern Ireland regarding my concern for the risk of SHB and will continue to do this.

BP thanked everyone for sharing their views and confirmed BHP has discussed import concerns with HMRC.

ACTION 35-1	Draft Forum statement on SHB concerns, (as set out in sections 3 of the Tor) outlining the views of the BHAF.
ACTION 35-2	LM provide the forum with lines on Unfettered Market Access
ACTION 35-3	Review SHB/import risk on the highlight report (RC)

4. Terms of Reference (ToR) 11:15

RC had circulated draft ToR prior to the meeting invited the Forum to raise any points for discussion, taking each numbered section in turn.

2.5MG proposed adding explanatory paragraph regarding who but was content to leave as is.

3 AR agreed a complete consensus on statements should not be necessary and requested that the Forum is informed when their view is conveyed to ministers, even if we don't see the content of what is provided. BP/LM confirmed this should be actioned.

TW suggested amending the second sentence to read 'Forum members'

4. Two Forum members had enquired prior to the meeting, regarding the selection process of science representatives. BP outlined a recommendation process and highlighted how the post was unpaid, only travel and subsistence expenses relating to the meeting could be paid. BP confirmed a science adviser role specification could be drafted and agreed by correspondence.

NC outlined how the level of science input had changed over the last 10 years. The level of science input had been somewhat disappointing over the period of the

original Healthy Bees Plan. Asked if there is an opportunity to invite overseas experts regarding SHB?

MS suggested how one adviser should be able to invite other specific scientist experts for specific issues?

BP agreed with MS that the Forum should feel we could invite scientific experts when appropriate.

WS warned it may very difficult to get agreement from a group of scientists, competitive funding issues/rivalry could make for a combative forum.

BP summarised that there was more discussion to be had on the topic of science adviser and proposed this should be taken forward by correspondence.

ACTION 35-4	Forum to forward any further comments on the ToR by 26th February
ACTION 35-5	Amend Tor as discussed, draft a description of the science advisor role. (RC/BP)

4.2 Number of representatives attending per organisation

AR asked the Forum to consider that as BBKA represented so many beekeepers it was helpful to have two forum members from BBKA. Pam contributed much in her role, and aided continuity with the BBKA. JB and WS felt that it was also useful for WBKA to be able to send two representatives.

WS suggested as a scientist he regularly brought forward points that were applicable to beekeeping generally, not only specific to Welsh beekeeping.

MG clarified how BFA feel that only one representative from each organisation should attend, but understood from this discussion that BFA could send two reps.

BP confirmed that BFA can send two representatives.

RC asked for the Forum's consent to send e-mail correspondence to the BHAF openly. The group agreed best practice was to use the BCC option so that others' e-mail addresses were not visible.

BIBBA had written to RC to ask if they may join the Forum as an organisation and had a discussion to consider BIBBA's Forum membership. The consensus was that because BIBBA's agenda focussed heavily on improvement and breeding, that their expertise was most valuably utilised to provide guidance in working groups on these topics e.g. queen rearing and breeding. BIBBA could also be invited to the Forum when the agenda items were appropriate and/or if they wished to discuss research.

ACTION 35-6	Write to BIBBA and confirm the Forum's decision and ways of working (RC)
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7. Review paragraph

After discussion RC summarised two agreed amendments to 7; to include membership appointments and science advisor agreements. Once agreed, the ToR is to be uploaded to BeeBase to be publicly available.

Comfort break 12:05

3 Implementation Plan for HBP 2030

RC gave an update on the progress of the implementation plan which had been slower than we had hoped.

We intend to have a focussed implementation meeting before the next ordinary Forum meeting, specifically to discuss the implementation plan. The aim of this agenda item was to gather the Forum's views on core topics for education and RC recorded the Forum's thoughts during the meeting.

Much of the discussion focussed on who needed education most, and the level of experience where focussed bee health education could be of most value to bee health overall.

MG confirmed the BFA's focus related to the importance of sustainable rural jobs in rural locations.

ACTION 35-7	RC to circulate the slide and the Forum to forward any further topics in the next two weeks.
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4 AOB. Communications and News led by BP

4.1 Neonicotinoid derogation.

AR highlighted how the BBKA is highly concerned about the Neonicotinoid derogation, it's potential impact on the soil/ field margins and bees and other pollinators. She also asked for clarity whether the data for the 2020 harvest was accurate and if the seed coating to be used in 2021. She mentioned how Wildlife Trust are challenging the derogation with a Judicial Review. BBKA is highly concerned the derogation is the short end of the wedge? BBKA members take the position that the derogation is not necessary.

CH clarified that the NFU wholly support the derogation. Sugar-beet losses were devastating in 2019, 80% - 40% losses. CH offered to answer any questions from the Forum, the same offer he made recently to the Pollinator Advisory Steering Group (PASG). There are a lot of myths circulating e.g. that the protocol includes spraying wildflowers - which it does not, the protocol does encourage those using it, to reduce weeds in the crop. The criteria in application sets out that the seed treatment would only be applied if it is triggered by the [Rothamstead model](#). There is a strong likelihood that it could be used in 2021. However, the cold weather may make it unnecessary to use, as low temperatures naturally reduce the aphid population. A decision will be made in the next week.

CH explained how the UK is not the first country to apply for a derogation, 13 EU countries have already granted emergency derogations for use on sugar-beet. NFU continue to support a sustainable homegrown sugar industry.

WS: I did some research; before neonicotinoids were available there was research to breed virus resistant breeds of sugar beet. Is there now an opportunity for this research to continue?

CH: Plant breeding work is ongoing. We now have new breeding techniques and technologies such as gene editing to be able to provide solutions to future challenges. If we don't want to use pesticides, gene-editing may provide the solutions.

CH invited Forum members to forward any further questions they have about the derogation.

4.2 V.A.T. petition on Bee keeping equipment

AR asked for the Forum's position on VAT as there was currently an online parliamentary petition: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/550752>

MG confirmed the BFA's view; that as people can register with HMRC and [claim VAT back](#), VAT is not an issue.

AR thanked the Forum for sharing their positions.

4.3 BBKA's Asian Hornet Conference – 06/03/202

AR confirmed that the BBKA is running an Asian Hornet conference. Andrew Durham, Dr Eric Darrouzet, Dr Peter Kennedy, Dr Rojas-Nossa and Nigel Semmence are speaking.

4.4 BDI explained how they are working with NBU undertaking whole apiary shook swarm trials where a single case of foul brood is found. BDI will compensate for the empty comb in the apiary. We plan to share data in 2 years.

4.5 BDI administer insurance for active beekeepers and hope to work with the NBU to help data-cleanse BeeBase. Currently working through the GDPR requirements and hope to progress during 2021.

5. Meeting closed abruptly at 13:00

A scheduled meeting started from the same Defra account. RC sent out an email requesting future meeting dates, confirming the short-term actions and requesting if anyone had further news or AOB to be circulated.

Proposed Future Forum meeting dates:

No	Dates/info	Location
36	End Q1 Thursday 24/06/2021 between 13:30 – 16:00	Zoom
37	End Q2 Thursday 09/09/2021 between 13:30 – 16:00	Zoom
38	End Q3 Thursday 09/12/2021 between 10:30 – 13:00	TBC