

Importing Bees

Mike Brown and Jason Learner, National Bee Unit

Importing honey bees can be a significant management and/or commercial activity for some professional beekeeping enterprises in the United Kingdom (UK).

These imports help, for example, to replenish winter losses, to increase colony numbers and to enable requeening of colonies which have performed unsatisfactorily. Imported bees can represent significant additional income when sold on as nuclei, etc.

The UK has imported queens from overseas (both European Union [EU]

Packaged bees supplied from within the European Union

countries and wider afield) for at least 100 years. So far in 2015, there have been 192 consignments of queens (7429), package bees (2393), colonies (16) and nucleus colonies (80) imported from 11 different EU member states. Information on the numbers of legally imported bees in recent years is available to view on the National Bee Unit (NBU) website, BeeBase.

With such large numbers of bees being brought into the UK every year, it is important that measures are put in place to protect against any harmful threats to UK apiculture. Importing honey bees or queens can pose risks. For example, along with the consignment, exotic pests (small hive beetle [SHB] and *Tropilaelaps* mites) and/or statutory diseases such as European foulbrood (EFB) or American foulbrood (AFB) could be brought into the country. The recent incursion of SHB in Italy last year demonstrates that these threats are very real and should not be taken lightly. In particular, when importing from outside the EU, beekeepers should ensure that they follow the proper procedures.

Import Legislation

Import regulations have been the UK's main defence against the introduction of serious bee pests and diseases from overseas for quite some time. The earliest records of import legislation for honey bees can be traced back as far as the early 1950s: 'Imports of Bees Order 1955: Policy, MAF 126/66–126/67' and 'Importation of Bees Order 1955: Check tests on health certificates; Procedures, MAF 126/71'. Should you be interested, these documents can be viewed upon request at the National Archives. It is absolutely essential that all beekeepers abide by the regulations. Bees can

be imported safely if they satisfy the requirements of the following legislation:

- The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011 ('the TARP regulations') which lay down the controls that apply to imports of *Apis mellifera* (honey bees) and *Bombus* spp. (bumblebees) from other member states and from countries outside the EU.
- The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006 ('the Order') which lays down the enforcement provisions for the post-import controls that apply to all imports of bees from countries outside the EU.
- Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010 which lists the countries outside the EU from which bees may be imported, health certification requirements and the post-import controls.
- Commission Decision 2006/855/EC which lays down the health certification requirements and the post-import checks (packaged bees) for bees imported from New Zealand.
- Council Directive 92/65/EEC (commonly known as the 'Balai' Directive) which lays down the health certification requirements for bees moving between member states of the EU.

For imports from outside the EU beekeepers need to ensure their suppliers come from one of the few countries that can meet the EU import requirements. These countries are able to comply with the legislative and regulatory criteria and provide a health certificate which states stock is free from SHB, *Tropilaelaps*, EFB and AFB. To help protect colonies, import legislation exists to prevent the introduction and spread of bee pests and diseases while also allowing trade and business to continue.



It is worth remembering that this legislation is not just about honey bees; bees are included within the Animal Health trade rules, so it is the whole of the livestock and animal industry that is subject to the same types of rules to ensure livestock is checked and certified as healthy prior to trade and movements. The rules include very simple procedures that must be followed when a beekeeper chooses to import honey bee queens or packages. It is important that beekeepers comply with these requirements and are aware of the consequences should they not follow the correct rules and regulations. The procedures are slightly different depending on whether the bees are imported from the EU or from third countries (outside the EU). These are now outlined below. There are guidance notes for bee importers on BeeBase that provide further details.

Importing from European Union Member States

The procedures to notify the NBU are easy and simple. Beekeepers must fill in a New Import Notification form which can be found on the 'Import and Export' pages of BeeBase. This should then be emailed, posted or faxed to the NBU office, or you can log in to the beekeeper pages of BeeBase and click the 'Add New Import' link from the left hand index. Once this form is submitted, the NBU office will be notified of your intention to import and will be given the expected arrival date of the consignment which you have provided. These records must be updated if this date is expected to change, which can be done via your BeeBase login or by contacting the NBU office.

The beekeeper must notify all imports in advance to the NBU and ensure that consignments are accompanied by a health certificate (photocopies are not acceptable) which should be obtained by the supplier and issued once the packages have been checked by the relevant veterinary authorities of the exporting country. This certificate will confirm that the packages are free from the statutory disease AFB and the exotic pests small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps*.

The NBU will carry out document checks on every consignment entering the UK from an EU member state and send out an inspector to at least 30 per cent of consignments to carry out physical spot checks on them once the bees arrive in the UK. The inspection service is risk based and all registered apiaries have an attributed risk category. This means that any apiary which is

identified as being at risk as a result of a notified import or any other identified risk will be visited as a priority. Failure to register your import or your apiaries could mean that they get missed, putting your own bees and those of other local beekeepers potentially at risk.

Risk-based Inspection Programme

The NBU team completes a targeted, risk-based statutory pest and disease inspection programme for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Welsh Government which focuses on the detection and control of the statutorily notifiable diseases AFB and EFB and the detection (and eradication) of exotic pest threats such as *Tropilaelaps* mites and the small hive beetle, *Aethina tumida*. Of these, exotic pest surveillance (EPS) inspections represent an important percentage of the annual statutory programme. Those colonies that are registered within 5 km of foulbrood will be inspected as a priority over those colonies which are not. In addition, apiaries situated close to (<10 km) civilian and military airports, freight depots and ports of entry (for fruit and other foodstuffs), apiaries belonging to bee importers and surrounding apiaries are inspected as a priority for exotic threats. Furthermore, if the small hive beetle is found here, apiaries containing bees moved from declared infested areas will also be a priority. A map of these risk points is available to view on BeeBase.

Importing from Third Countries

The term 'third country' is used by the European Commission to define any country which is not one of the 28 EU member states. The commodity you wish to import will determine which countries you are allowed to import from, so:

- queen bees may only be imported from selected third countries, mainly those that list AFB, SHB and *Tropilaelaps* as notifiable pests. We are aware that currently only Argentina, Australia and New Zealand are able to meet these requirements
- package bees from outside of the EU may only be imported from New Zealand and must comply with post-import controls. These controls are aimed at reducing the risk of the introduction and spread of exotic bee pests.

When importing from a third country you need to notify the NBU at least 24 hours before the package is due to



A large consignment of packaged queens from Argentina

arrive in the UK. In addition to this you must notify one of the three Border Inspection Posts (BIP) through which your consignment will arrive: Manchester, Heathrow or Gatwick airports. Again, failure to acquire a valid health certificate and import through the proper channels will mean that you are committing an offence under the TARP regulations and, as a result, you could have the bees seized and destroyed or, worse still, you could be responsible for infecting colonies with a serious pest or disease.

Post-Import Controls

When you receive a consignment of imported queen honey bees from a third country you must:

- transfer the queens to new (queen) cages before they are introduced to any local colonies
- send the original (queen) cages, attendant worker bees and other material that accompanied the queen bees from their country of origin to the NBU within five days of receipt for examination for the presence of SHB and *Tropilaelaps* mites.

Bee packages from New Zealand are subject to a percentage check (depending on the quantity imported) at the destination apiary and this needs to be discussed and agreed in advance with your local bee inspector.

It is very good practice to keep records of beekeepers to whom you have sold any imported bees. This will enable them to be contacted quickly by the NBU in the event that any pests or diseases are found in an imported consignment. Beekeepers registered on the NBU's BeeBase database can record a purchase, sale or gift of bees within their BeeBase records. BeeBase can be found online at www.nationalbeeunit.com □