

Honey Bee Imports and Exports

Julian Parker and **Adam Parker**, National Bee Unit, detail the post-Brexit situation as it has progressed

The United Kingdom (UK) left the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020. One year later (1 January 2021), after a transition period, new import and export rules applied, as the UK is now trading as a 'third country' – essentially a country outside the EU and its economic structures. This meant that the UK was now required to meet EU rules or requirements applying to third countries in order to continue to export to the EU and, similarly, the UK applied similar third country requirements to imports received from EU countries. These third country rules restricted the

import/export of bees from/to the EU to queens only.

Some aspects of import and export arrangements are still under review as the government seeks to find ways to limit new administrative burdens on British businesses and people. This is why the remaining import controls, originally intended to come into force on 1 July 2022, will no longer be introduced. Instead, there is an acceleration of the transformation programme to digitise borders. Therefore, no further import controls on EU goods are anticipated this year.

In the autumn, the government will publish a Target Operating Model (TOM) that will set out a new regime of border

controls, targeting the end of 2023 as the revised introduction date. The new regime will apply equally to goods from the EU and rest of world. The new regime will be based on an assessment of risk, with a proportionate, technology-led approach to controls. Details of these proposals may be found in the document published by HM Government UK Transition, *The Border with the European Union – Importing and Exporting Goods, Border Strategy & Design – June 2022*, available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1083393/2022-06-15_Border_Operating_Model__1_.pdf

For bees, what this means is that there will be no further changes to import or export arrangements until late in 2023 at the earliest. The anticipated requirement for bees from the EU to pass through and be subject to checks at Border Control Posts (BCPs) will not be introduced this year as expected. So, imported queens will continue to be permitted to travel to place of destination, with any applicable checks taking place at destination. The requirement for bees to be checked at BCPs remains under review.

Current Import Arrangements

To summarise import arrangements that currently apply to bees:

Part of an imported consignment of queens



Queen imports from the EU

Pre/Post	Year	Batched Number of Queens	Number of Queens: Net of Queens with Packages
Post Brexit	To August 2022	18,433	18,433
	2021	14,018	14,018
Pre Brexit	2020	21,405	19,503
	2019	20,081	17,458
	2018	15,946	14,950

Note: imports of queens are still being notified, so the 2022 figure will continue to increase until the end of the season

Non EU member countries: imports must enter via a Border Control Post (BCP) (no change in rules).

EU member states: imports will be checked at destination, with no further changes expected until late 2023.

More detailed information is available from BeeBase:

- BeeBase Imports and Exports: www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?sectionid=47
- Guidance notes for importers: www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=977

If you are importing or exporting from Northern Ireland then the Northern Ireland Protocol should be consulted at www.gov.uk/government/collections/moving-goods-into-out-of-or-through-northern-ireland-from-1-january-2021

It should be noted that movements of queen bees from Great Britain (GB) to Northern Ireland are treated as an export and so must follow the same procedure as those being exported to EU member states and therefore they also require an Export Health Certificate (EHC).

Exports Since January 2022

Since January 2022, Export Health Certificates for exports to EU countries must be signed by an Official Veterinarian (OV). For countries outside the EU, whether an OV is required to sign the EHC is determined by the authorities in the country of destination, so it is important for the exporter to check the requirements with them. If you intend to export bees from GB, you must ensure that the destination country permits imports from GB and that you can comply with their import conditions. It is the exporter's responsibility to do this.

For exports to any country, if you export your bees without the correct certification, the consignment may be rejected or destroyed by the destination country. If the consignment required an inspection prior to export, we would not be able to issue a certificate retrospectively.

Only queen bees can be exported to EU countries. To export queen bees, you must obtain an EHC (valid for ten days) and arrange for it to be signed by an OV. The OV must carry out a health inspection at the apiary before the certificate can be signed and exporters should expect that there will be a charge for the services of an OV. The health certificate template can be found on gov.uk, along with notes for guidance and information on how to contact an OV.

The OV will also confirm whether a National Bee Unit (NBU) inspector (England and Wales) or a Scottish Government bee inspector also need to be present to support the OV at the health inspection. The OV can find information about how to contact a bee inspector in the notes for guidance.

Movement restrictions due to Fireblight Disease should also be considered when planning to export bees to EU countries. Fireblight is a serious disease of apples, pears and other related trees and shrubs in the Rosaceae family. Restrictions apply between 15 March and 30 June each year, requiring bees to be quarantined by a period of confinement prior to travel.

Changes to Importing Patterns Since Leaving the EU

The biggest change since leaving the EU has come from packages no longer able to be imported into GB from EU member states. In the fifteen years prior to leaving the EU, imports of packages have gone through several phases. In the seven years up to 2013, package imports were pretty much non-existent and were not a feature in the pattern of imports. Since 2013, imports of packages have fluctuated in number between 1,000 and 2,000 annually. After leaving the EU, a small number were imported by businesses in Northern Ireland in the 2021 season and were subsequently moved into GB. As of mid-August 2022, this season, no packages have been imported into Northern Ireland.

The volume of queens being imported into GB from the EU has remained fairly constant comparing numbers imported before and after leaving the EU, once the numbers of queens associated with package imports before leaving the EU are accounted for. The table above illustrates. Note: imports of queens are still being notified, so the 2022 figure will continue to increase until the end of the season.

Detailed import data is available on BeeBase: www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/BeeDiseases/importReport.cfm

The range of countries exporting queens to the UK shows no discernable change, with the following countries all featuring: Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia. The absence of the Czech Republic being the only notable exception, where annually we have previously seen between 100–150 queens. We have no evidence of this being due either to Brexit or just simple movement in the market.

Generally, now in the second year of new arrangements, importers appear to be coping well with the changes and new import systems. These were understandably a challenge for all importers initially, not just bees, as familiarity needed to be established with new import systems.

Work Still To Be Done

We may have left the EU, but there remains work still to be done and further changes ahead with UK Borders and Trade. The Target Operating Model is still being worked on and will start to deliver changes in late 2023. While changes are not always welcome, it is essential that import checks strike the right balance between reducing friction and costs for businesses on the one hand and ensuring UK biosecurity is protected on the other, to manage the risk of unwelcome introductions of pests and diseases that could cause great harm to UK beekeeping. □