

**Minutes of the Bee Health Advisory Forum 32<sup>nd</sup> Meeting**  
**Teleconference hosted from APHA, Sand Hutton, York**  
**18<sup>th</sup> June 2020, 10:30 – 13:00**

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Kevin Beattie (KB)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP) - minutes	
Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Fera Science Ltd
Rebekah Clarkson (RC)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Mairi Carnegie (MC)	SASA – Scottish Government
Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers’ Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers’ Association (WBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	
Pam Hunter (PH)	British Beekeepers’ Association (BBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	
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)

Apologies received from:

Luis Molero (LM)	Scottish Government
Rob Nickless (RN)	Bee Farmers’ Association
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers’ Union
Nigel Semmence (NS)	National Bee Unit
Sandra Gray (SG)	
Louisa Willows (LW)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Ian Fenn (IF)	

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. MC had kindly agreed to attend the meeting on behalf of Luis Molero, Scottish Government.

## **2. Minutes and actions; highlight report for Q4 2019-20 (RC)**

RC was aware that the year needed to be amended on the title page of the minutes of the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting (held on 06/03/20). There were no other comments on the minutes of the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting.

The intention now was to issue brief minutes, agree by e-mail, then publish. This could save time discussing minutes in meetings. There was agreement that this approach seemed sensible.

### **Actions**

**All forum members** – an outstanding action concerned how future forums might be constituted. Please e-mail Becky with any suggestions as to possible forum representatives by 10<sup>th</sup> August.

BP explained that this was something we needed to consider, especially as the new Healthy Bees Plan was in development now.

### Closed actions

31.1 - the original Terms of Reference for the BHAF had been circulated.

31.2 - Basic Assessment data had been provided by BBKA and WBKA.

31.6 - AR had circulated Asian hornet slides from her presentation at the March forum.

31.7 - MG had circulated wording on the economic value of pollination.

31.10 - the hive count had been noted as a topic for a future forum.

31.11 - proposed future forum dates had been circulated.

### **Highlight report – Q4**

COVID-19 guidance for beekeepers had been published on BeeBase.

Policy colleagues had continued to work on drawing together all the content for the HBP review.

No new risks had been identified, but a new issue had been added in relation to COVID-19.

It was expected that the HBP review would be published in September.

### **3. COVID-19 - update from NBU and other forum members**

The Chair introduced this item, an opportunity to hear members' experiences of COVID-19.

#### **National Bee Unit (JP)**

At the outset, 13 inspectors had been self-isolating and NBU also had 6 staff vacancies. Recruitment had since got underway to fill 4 posts. NBU field force capacity had now recovered to stand at 75%.

Beekeepers were being asked to consider if they need to be present during inspection. Social distancing was in operation and this limited how closely beekeepers could observe an inspection. In some cases, unless an apiary appeared to be very high risk, inspections had to be postponed.

Some work not of immediate priority had been paused, e.g. DASH baseline inspections and DASH audits. Statutory honey residue sampling for VMD would now start towards end of June.

Training provision would not restart this year. Three new Youtube training videos, produced by Fera Science Ltd, were available via BeeBase. BBKA News would feature a news item to promote them.

NBU's initial focus had been on completing inspections for RED risk apiaries. From mid-May, this had been extended to all of the RED and AMBER list, i.e. much closer to business as usual.

Inspection numbers had been running slightly ahead of this time last year – around 2,600 visits made, equating to more than 13,000 colonies. Time had been saved by not being able to hold face-to-face meetings or routine training. Newcastle University had reviewed NBU's Red-Amber-Green risk rules, resulting in fewer inspections focussed on exotic pests, which were lengthier inspections.

Disease had been tracking along levels similar to 2019, i.e. quite a high incidence again of EFB.

Imports had still been arriving – 168 consignments declared this year. EFB had been detected in a recent import from Italy and NBU had a trace forward operation in place. The EFB strain type had not previously been found in the UK. In response to a question from TW, JP advised that he was not currently aware of any possible movement to Northern Ireland but agreed to let TW know.

Asian hornet track and trace work to locate nests would not be a challenge. Agency protocols were in place to address issues such as hotel accommodation for inspectors and how to conduct meetings.

In response to a question from MG, JP advised that within the wider agency work was being done to assist the COVID response, e.g. diagnostics, but NBU's work was unaffected.

Looking ahead, there would probably always be a place for physical meetings. Social interaction was important but there was a strong case for retaining some of the current approaches to working.

## **BBKA (AR)**

BBKA had had to cancel their Spring Convention, resulting in huge impacts. BBKA's office had had to close, with some staff on furlough. While so much income was lost from cancelled training courses, exams and events including the Spring Convention, BBKA still had the costs of maintaining its apiary.

Lots of queries received from among BBKA's 26,000 members and lots of requests for BBKA publications. NS had quickly provided a very helpful letter and it had been reassuring to see the government guidelines. Important for beekeepers to continue to check for Varroa and disease.

People were being signed up to Asian Hornet Teams (AHTs). There was an online training exercise to help improve people's ability to identify AH and understand the limits of what AHTs can do. Pest controllers so far say they haven't had any call outs mentioning Asian hornet.

Enhanced use of technology was improving interaction among colleagues and supporting the provision of beginners' courses. Events, both large and small, had still been happening. NC added that Tom Seeley's talks were available on BBKA's website and had proved popular (link on page 6).

It seemed that some things will continue to be different in the longer term but there were occasions when it would be invaluable to meet in person.

PH explained that there had been a devastating impact on the BBKA research programme. Universities were severely impacted as working from home was so difficult for many researchers.

NC added that a COLOSS survey in early May had looked at COVID impact – details on the COLOSS website. Results to be published at the end of this year in the Journal of Apicultural Research.

## **WBKA (JB)**

Training and events had been cancelled, but best efforts were being made to make use of the technology. WS had delivered a learning webinar for 340 people last week.

WS added that there is no substitute for face-to-contact, but a lot of meetings can be held quite satisfactorily and save a lot of travel.

## **NDB (AL)**

NDB's one-week residential advanced course had been cancelled due to COVID. An online version was available, covering theory only and comprising 2-hour sessions over 6 days. Students presented to tutors and vice versa. An external speaker had been brought in to speak about comb construction. NDB hoped to run some practical aspects of the course later in the year, close to the end of summer, to provide experience of seeing EFB and EFB combs.

## **BFA (MG) – Powerpoint presentation**

This had been a busy time for bee farmers aside from COVID – all their work had to continue during this period, including pollination work. Knowledge exchange work was continuing.

Priorities had included looking after livestock, ensuring the right types of grants were available to businesses and providing advice to members. It was important to consider the possibility of a second wave of COVID. Availability of seasonal workers had been a major issue. BFA would like to be informed of any developments and have an opportunity to be involved in any government consultations.

<b>ACTION 32.1</b>	Defra Policy Team to inform MG of relevant developments in government regarding availability of seasonal workers
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Important to note that bee health was a devolved matter. BFA had taken part in discussions with Scottish Govt and would have welcomed the opportunity to engage in similar discussions in England.

Apprenticeships – one person had been affected as their provisional employer had not been able to employ them. Block release training had been cancelled and coursework had proceeded online as far as possible. The apprenticeship period had been extended slightly to allow completion of work. BFA were grateful to their corporate sponsors including Rowse for their support during this time.

There had been lots of interest from the public in becoming a bee farmer, and increased media attention. Concerns had been raised about honey supply, including for medicinal purposes. There was an increased need for adult training and more would be done in future.

The age profile of beekeepers had been reducing recently, and this meant that many bee farmers had children to home-school which impacted on time available for apiary maintenance. BFA have links with the Farming Community Network, who have been able to provide support to a lot of worried farmers including bee farmers.

Honey consumption was increasing: there was a need to increase honey production and also wax. As a member of the Wax Chandlers Guild MG had attended a very useful presentation recently (unfortunately not recorded – it may be run again). There was interest from the forum in this presentation and it would be appreciated if MG could advise if the presentation becomes available.

## **4. Research project on Varroa control and treatments (KS) – Powerpoint presentation**

KS delivered a presentation on her project examining how to optimise Varroa treatments, with the aim of providing information to beekeepers on what might be effective in different situations.

The project focussed on management styles – comparing small-scale beekeeping with large-scale. Initial results indicated that the effectiveness of thymol can vary from 60%-87% - the mean was 76%.

PH had a concern that the bees were being subjected to quite a lot of treatments and asked how efficacy was measured. KS explained that it was calculated relative to final treatment.

WS had attended a recent beekeeper Q&A, where the point had been raised that very few beekeepers knew the lifecycle of Varroa, which impacts on when treatments should be applied.

WS felt that it was the number of mites that survive the treatment that was important in determining effectiveness and not so much the mortality rate.

## **AOB**

Regarding the EFB-infected import (NBU update at item 3 above), JH wondered if the Italian authorities could be asked to check other packages coming from the source. JP agreed it was a possibility – NBU had been trying to build up evidence and could then discuss with policy colleagues.

BHAF meeting dates – face-to-face meetings were not expected in the near future. A few extra meetings may be useful, e.g. to discuss the implementation plan for the new Healthy Bees Plan.

BP mentioned that Bees' Needs Week would start on 13<sup>th</sup> July. Various online events taking place this year and forum members were encouraged to support Bees' Needs Week where possible.

Forum members were asked to feed back to Rebekah any comments they may have on the effectiveness of today's Zoom meeting.

Meeting closed.

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Following the meeting, NC circulated the following links:

BBKA Spring Convention videos: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/spring-convention-videos>

Preliminary results of COLOSS COVID-19 survey: <https://coloss.org/news/coloss-survey-impact-of-covid-19-on-research-results/>