

Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
28th meeting
Defra, Nobel House, Smith Square, London
21st June 2019, 11:00 – 15:00

Present:

Belinda Phillipson (BP)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Kevin Beattie (Kevin B)	
Ian Fenn	Defra Pollinator Strategy
Nigel Semmence (NS)	Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA), National Bee Unit (NBU)
Rebekah Clarkson (BC) ☎	
Julian Parker (JP)	
Myles Munroe (MM)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government
Fiona Hight MBE	Scottish Government
Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Fera Science Ltd
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	
Pam Hunter (PH)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Anne Rowberry	
Chris Hartfield ☎ (CH)	National Farmers Union
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University
John Hill	British Bee Veterinary Association (BBVA)

☎ indicates "joined by telephone"

Apologies received from:

Frank Petherbridge	Bee Health Policy (Defra)
Anna Burrows	VMD
Dan Basterfield Ken Basterfield	National Diploma in Beekeeping
Maureen Wakefield	Fera Science Ltd
Leyland Walker	DAERA
Ged Marshall	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)

1. Welcome and introductions – BP

BP welcomed everyone.

2. Minutes of 27th meeting, Actions, Q4 Highlight report 2018-2019

Notes

WS noted that Linfa Davis's name had been spelt incorrectly. There were no other comments and the minutes were agreed.

Actions:

Action on product journey – LM confirmed this could be closed.

Terms of reference – on hold until autumn when the new plan would be discussed.

23/5 – closed

23/6 – on indicators - BP agreed this could be closed as the information had not been collected consistently. NC agreed the indicators had been changed during the plan to make more measurable.

24/5 – on science reporting was to be discussed as an AOB.

Insect biomass – IF believed this could be closed as he had responded.

26/3 Apprentice – MG confirmed that she had made arrangements and was waiting to confirm the date. BHAF agreed that Phoebe Lane should attend the December meeting.

26/5 Queen rearing – KB advised this would be raised as part of the discussions on the next plan.

Training in Wales – discussion on-going but a site in Swansea had been identified for training this autumn. WBKA noted that they had plans to do an intermediate training course in-house.

Highlight Report

BC noted that some progress had been made on the Healthy Bees Plan and the workshop today would help prepare for the future plan. The intention was to consult this year.

On risks, KC asked for the Welsh Environment Act and the Wellbeing of future generations (Wales) Act be added to the dependencies. This was agreed by the BHAF.

KB asked if *Varroa* medicines was still a risk. JP noted that significant progress had been made on availability so he felt it could be removed. BHAF agreed this could be removed.

3. NBU Update

JP spoke to the slides distributed to all participants. Early recruitment meant that the NBU had managed to fill most SBI posts, however, there were vacancies in the NBU office and an RBI vacancy in the south east. A contingency exercise was planned for this summer. Import checks took a significant proportion of inspectorate time early in the season. NBU had committed to 54 events, including the Spring Convention and Tradex. They also hoped to be at the Honey Show.

JP noted that the inspectors were finding levels of European foulbrood higher than last year, however, last year was lower than average. Levels of imports were similar to previous years. He noted that most packages would have already been imported. Inspectors prioritise imports that present a higher risk of SHB. He also explained that sometimes it was difficult to persuade

importers to hold bees until they had been inspected: inspections would then be carried out further down the chain.

IPads

IPads had been rolled out to Bee Inspectors this season after a long development period. Data shows high uptake of IPads with more clear inspections being completed in the field electronically rather than by paper even after just a few weeks. JP noted that the graph also showed the impact on inspections during an extended period of bad weather. Feedback from inspectors had been very positive. It was hoped that infield recording of inspections would increase the time available for inspections and minimise the amount of time spent on administration. Beekeeper numbers on BeeBase had increased 4-fold without a significant uplift in inspector resources. This impacted the number of “at risk” apiaries. Work was underway to look at the criteria for “at risk” apiaries to make adjustments based on the findings since BeeBase was established. The number of commercial keepers had also increased. MG noted that it also removed the chance of errors in transcription. NS said that having local beekeeper information available in the field will help when dealing with an outbreak.

Inspection numbers

The number of inspections had fallen since 2014. JP explained that this was due to a change in focus of the inspections. More resources had been put into exotic inspections which were more time consuming compared to foulbrood inspections. The Random Apiary Survey had been a more time intensive inspection as it required in-depth sampling. Changes in administrative burdens and in some years vacant posts had also had an impact on the number of inspections that could be achieved. He noted that continuing uncertainties over the impact of EU exit and APHA budget would potentially affect the number of inspections in future years. The roll-out of IPads and the introduction of a field service management system were being introduced to try to protect the inspectorate’s field time. JP also explained about an issue with the LFD’s for foulbrood. NBU have bought all that were available but only a third of their normal number. More may become available later in the season. If there is a shortfall or a problem with a test at the hive then comb samples will be taken.

Preparedness

Asian hornet reports following a similar pattern to previous years. NS confirmed that CEH had a method of identifying library photos. BP encouraged everyone to direct people to the app as best method of reporting: email is the least favoured option. 6 inspectors would be working in Jersey to gain experience of Asian hornet (3 teams of 2 inspectors).

DASH

JP explained that the NBU had sent a survey to 70 people registered on DASH. So far 27 responses had been received. It would run for a further week. It was important for the NBU to see how the scheme could be improved. They had already adapted the scheme with a pre-application questionnaire. This had improved the quality of candidates undertaking the training so the training could be adapted to take account of their level. There were 10 questions in the survey and so far most bee farmers had a positive view of the scheme and its operation. MG felt that the bee farmers felt pride in being part of the scheme and NS believed that they also felt positively about having the skill to identify foulbrood and being open about reporting it.

WS was concerned about the increase in the number of packages imported and wondered if commercial keepers or amateurs were driving the increase. JP felt it was evenly split. Packages for suppliers would be bought by amateurs and commercial keepers appreciated the ability to supplement stock coming out of winter. FH wondered if the EU packages replaced the ones previously imported from NZ. The NBU confirmed that few third country packages were being imported.

In response to JH, NS confirmed that the approach to Asian hornet is different in Jersey and UK: in Jersey beekeepers are leading the response. AHAT's are a positive experience of working in partnership. The chapter in the Asian Hornet handbook had been written some time ago. AR confirmed that the views did not necessarily reflect other county associations. NS noted that the Defra press office have put considerable effort into correcting misleading reporting. AR confirmed that the BBKA also were active in contacting editors of misleading articles. In response to NC, NS confirmed there are photos of Asian hornet in the BeeBase gallery.

4. Healthy Bee Plan Review and our future 'What could we achieve together in the future?'

BP provided an overview of the project and timeline and explained the aim and the arrangements for the workshop. Attendees were to write up to 5 hopes for the next plan. These should be stuck on the board and Belinda would subsequently arrange into categories. The ideas from the group are attached in the annex. CH talked through his suggestions relating to a voluntary biosecurity scheme, flowering crops and Brexit. NC asked if there were any limitations on the ideas for discussion. BP said that things had changed since the first plan had started so there will be fresh ideas on content however, there would not be large increase in budget. In response to WS, BP noted that Defra do not have a view on strains of bees but were concerned about the risks associated with imports which could be mitigated by increasing UK production. BHAF were asked to identify their 2 highest priority ideas (also recorded in the Annex).

5. Animal Health Law

LM spoke to the slides distributed to the Forum. She explained the links between the AHL, OCR and Plant Health Regulation, provided an overview of the AHL and explained how this affected beekeepers. The implications of the detailed rules that have recently been issued for consultation were also discussed. PH felt that beekeepers would have concerns about a mandatory register.

6. AOB/comms/news

6a Hive Count

BP explained that there had been an error in data collection in 2017. The actual figure was 252,189 – an increase of 2%. This would not affect our apiculture funding. The figure for 2018 was 244,406. These figures will now be added to BeeBase. The change in numbers were likely to be part of normal fluctuation in the statistics. In total 7,000 beekeepers had updated their figures since the hive count started.

WS asked about his query on length of time the people responding had been registered. Although the data could be obtained from BeeBase, it would be complicated to do the analysis so it was another caveat to note for the final figure. PH said that people often obtained bees without contacting anyone for any advice. NS noted that some groups of beekeepers may be unwilling to engage with any official process.

6b Apiculture programme/ EU exit update

UK programme has been agreed. The UK has been allocated 1.39% of funding in accordance with the percentage of hives in the EU. This is a slight reduction for us even with an increase in the total EU budget available for apiculture. The UK would now receive 558k € per annum. Exact levels of funding would be dependent on Brexit and exchange rates.

6c Queen Rearing

BP confirmed that there was some progress on this including BBKA developing a course. Defra was information gathering. PH felt we should retain a range of methods for queen rearing. MG explained that at least 2 of the apprentices had chosen to focus on bee breeding. FH noted that in Scotland there was a desire to improve and build up stocks. AR felt that a cascade system with teaching within local associations would be an important element.

6d Science Input

Action from 06/2018: BHAF query regarding reviewing/recording BHAF science input with Defra science and evidence team to understand best practice and report back to BHAF

BP felt that the science and evidence objective was the one that had made the least progress under the Healthy Bees Plan. There was a wealth of information available but it took time to gather and interpret. PH reported that BBKA were funding a project on forage in Newcastle by supplementing local forage using large planters and surveying the pollinators using them. KC noted that a similar project was running in the National Botanic Gardens of Wales. PH also reported on POSHBEE which would be looking at colonies foraging on various crops. Reading University were taking samples which would be analysed in France and Italy.

MG reported that Steve Sunderland had been appointed as project officer for their adult education programme. BFA felt very lucky to have him on board.

7. Meeting closed

ACTION 22-10	Prepare draft TOR incorporating comments –Complete over email
ACTION 28_1	Item 3. Circulate pdf of NBU update presentation to BHAF (complete).
ACTION 28_2	Item 5. BHAF members invited to feedback to Louise