

Bee Health Advisory Forum 36th Meeting
24th June 2021, 13:30 – 16:00 (MS Teams Virtual Meeting)

In attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Louise Mount (LM)	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Nigel Semmence (NS)	
Cristina Ruiz Martin (CRM)	
Louisa Willows (LWs)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.
Linsey Watt	Scottish Government
Alison Knox	
Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Heard	
John Bowles (JB)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University
John Hill (JH)	British Bee Veterinary Association (BBVA)
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Ken Stapleton	
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Bob Smith	
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)

Apologies received from:

Kevin Beattie (KB)	Defra bee health policy - on secondment.
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	Defra bee health policy
Maureen Wakefield (MW)	Fera Science Ltd.
Luis Molero	Scottish Government
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)

Welcome, introductions and actions.

BP welcomed all to the 36th meeting. Minutes to the December meeting had been agreed over email and [published on BeeBase](#) in March.

Cristina Ruiz Martin, the new National Bee Inspector was welcomed to the meeting for the first time.

Previously the Forum had agreed that the risk of small hive beetle should be reviewed. RC asked for the Forum's view on changing this action to add the risk of 'illegal imports'.

JH approved of the approach to consider an illegal import risk item and reflected that SHB had now been present in Sicily since 2014.

NC: Explained how there is (anecdotal) evidence that there is more small hive beetle in Italy than is recorded in the official figures. The SHB pest risk assessment was last done in 2009 and there is a good case to update it. The risk of illegal imports is of concern but is a separate matter to the risk of SHB.

BP thanked everyone for their comments and agreed that risk assessments should be reviewed periodically.

ACTION 36-1	Consider updating risk assessments
--------------------	------------------------------------

1. Medicine risks to bees

The Forum welcomed Ken Stapleton, the Senior Environmental Advisor at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) who gave an update to the Forum on the current environmental legislation surrounding flea products used in companion animals. The active ingredients used have associated hazards to bees. There is concern for aquatic invertebrates from flea and flea and tick treatments because of the potential for wash off from dogs.

KS asked the Forum if it would be helpful to highlight the risk to BK's or are they already aware of this?

JH expressed his concern at the scale of prophylactic use in the veterinary profession not just in companion animals and also extensively in food producing animals.

BJ: It's important to understand the scale. The Wildlife Incident scheme reports 1 or 2 cases each year of bees being killed by flea products.

KS: The (WIS) scheme relies on people making the association; either the investigator or beekeeper. Are there any other sources of information about the death of bees that that could be fed into the VMD that will give us a greater understanding on what's happening in environment?

BJ: It would be interesting to know what the background levels of these medicines are in healthy communities.

NC: Gave an example of when Vet. Med's were recorded as the source of a poisoning incident, but he felt that agricultural pesticide misuse was more likely.

KS. If there's evidence or evidence gaps, there is scope to investigate and review products differently. John raised the important issue about the risk assessment was done for companion animals but was not as strict as for food producing animals.

ACTION 36-2	Develop VMD best practice guideline for companion animals regarding the toxicity of Vet meds on wildlife and bees
--------------------	---

ACTION 36-3	Further questions or evidence regarding medicine risk to bees to be sent directly to Tahira Kauser
--------------------	--

2. Terms of Reference

RC talked through amendments to the Terms of Reference.

ACTION 36-4	Circulate amended Terms of Reference for BHAF to approve via email.
--------------------	---

3. Implementation Plan

Signatories to the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 had had a meeting earlier in June and this item was to update the whole forum on the draft plan so far. The draft plan had been sent to the Forum the previous week.

The draft plan gives an overview of the actions we want to do and how we might measure them.

Deadlines had been written as the financial quarter they were due and a number of people requested that it would be simpler to list the deadline. It would be useful to make a note of when the review periods are planned as all actions currently marked as 'ongoing' will be reviewed at that time.

Action 23, 'Pre beekeeping products' to be written in plain english 'things that you really need to know before you keep bees'.

Action 45 – BDI action needs offline discussions to understand realistic timings.

Change proposed NFU item of 'Promote BeeConnected' to review. MS: It's not currently clear about how well the current systems work. If it's wonderful, then let's sing about the fact that it's wonderful. There isn't that feeling amongst beekeeping associations, at the moment. AR; BBKA have received feedback that BKs sign up for BeeConnected but don't hear anything back.

JH reflected that the farming community thought that BeeConnected was always fundamentally flawed, because spraying is both weather dependent and localized. Decisions are made very quickly and having a formal notification procedure giving a beekeeper enough time to act in the current format was unlikely to succeed. Most farmers know the beekeepers who have a significant population of bees on their farm and contact them directly.

BP agreed to circulate a further draft of the plan before it is published for any further comments.

ACTION 36-5	Edit actions and timings with date task due.
ACTION 36-6	Forum members without actions in the current draft to email RC.
ACTION 36-7	Circulate a final copy of the plan to the Forum prior to publication

4. AOB

4.1 Forum members invited to report unregistered Vet meds (TK)

ACTION 36-8	VMD to circulate links to Forum to report adverts of unregistered vet meds to VMD.
--------------------	--

4.2 Trading arrangements (AR)

AR asked Policy teams for an update on the bees arriving from Northern Ireland. Is the same ratio of inspections being done on bees coming over from Northern Ireland?

JP confirmed that there was unfettered access from Northern Ireland in line with Government policy. Some bee suppliers are notifying the National Bee Unit that they are receiving bees sourced from Italy and ask them to be checked.

AR asked if the Forum could consider producing an Importers Best Practice Guide where importers could sign up to a best practice guide for importing bees? Clearly there are constraints.

MS asked for confirmation regarding whether there is a move to change the 'ban' on importing package bees into GB?

BP confirmed there is no ban on packaged bees, but that packaged bees are not allowed because the EU has been classified as a third country. If there was any legislative change such as a ban, this would be discussed with the Forum.

ACTION 36-9	Consider an importers best practice guide action in the Implementation Plan
--------------------	---

Proposed Future Forum meeting dates:

No	Dates/info	Location
37	End Q2 Thursday 09/09/2021 between 13:30 – 16:00	MS Teams
38	End Q3 Thursday 09/12/2021 between 10:30 – 13:00	TBC