

Healthy Bees Plan

Summary note of 4th Meeting of the Science and Evidence Advisory Group (SEAG)

10th January 2011 - Nobel House, London

Present:

David Aston		Stephen Martin	
Dan Basterfield		Belinda Phillipson	Secretary of group
Giles Budge		Francis Ratnieks	
Norman Carreck		Wally Shaw	
Robin Dean		Mark Tatchell	Chair
Bernard Diaper			
Chris Hartfield			

Apologies from Mike Brown and Liz McIntosh

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed the group.

Summary and actions from the last meeting

The Chair introduced the summary and actions from the last meeting.
Actions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 had all been completed.

Action 9: Giles Budge reported that he and colleagues in the NBU were in progress with this action aimed at giving an estimate of unknown beekeepers.

Actions 2, 3, and 6 were timetabled for further discussion under the agenda.
The summary of the third meeting was agreed.

ACTION: Belinda Phillipson to send summary of 3rd SEAG meeting to the Devolved Administrations, and arrange for the summary to be posted on BeeBase.

2. Output from sub groups

Belinda Phillipson introduced the summaries from the sub group teleconference on Biosecurity and New Medicines, respectively.

Biosecurity

The subgroup had agreed that there were risks of pest and disease spread from sales and imports of bees. The Group had some discussion on the rise in the number of natural beekeepers (those who don't wish to apply chemicals in their hives or interfere with the bees). Francis Ratnieks said that American Foul Brood was the greatest problem for beekeepers and was likely to be of highest risk when equipment is reused and from sales of bees. One of the subgroup decisions was to explore the development of an assurance scheme and this was timetabled for discussion under Item 5. The subgroup had also agreed that further discussions covering other aspects of biosecurity would be useful.

New Medicines

Robin Dean asked whether Fera could produce a comparison of 'hive cleansers' highlighting how difficult treatments were to apply and efficacy levels. Giles Budge pointed out that the NBU could not make recommendations about products that were not approved. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) Action Plan which includes making EU-authorised products available in the UK should be encouraged. The Chair said that there were examples from the fruit and vegetable industry where a manufacturer and users have got together to get a product approved for specific applications. David Aston suggested that we are close to having an approved oxalic acid product available in the UK but also pointed out that having got approval we must send a strong message to beekeepers that they must use the approved product and not illegal self made concoctions. The Group agreed that VMD were doing a good job. The Chair suggested that honey buyers may also clamp down on honey containing residues from non-approved products.

DECISION: Depending on the future and structure of SEAG to consider future subgroup discussions as required.

3. Research priorities

The Chair described the email based exercise that had been carried out following the 3rd SEAG meeting to identify research priorities as part of drafting the business case for the next phase of the Healthy Bees Plan (HBP). Group members each identified the 3 most urgent research priority needs which they felt would have a significant impact on bee health, beekeeping and implementation of the HBP. A list of all the suggestions was compiled and from this list 6 categories identified. All the suggestions were placed into 1 of the 6 categories and on this basis 'Management and control of Varroa' was identified as the most urgent research priority. This was sent as the SEAG view to Project Management Board (PMB). The exercise was email based because of timing but it had been agreed that there should be a more thorough discussion at the fourth SEAG meeting.

The Chair pointed out that during the second SEAG meeting, threats which hadn't arrived in the UK yet were considered to be the highest priority with respect to further research. Norman Carreck suggested that Fera/NBU is already addressing these threats and because they are absent from the UK this would make it difficult for others to carry out such research. He felt that it would be better to review what others are doing and benefit from research that has already been carried out. David Aston felt that there should be a clear division between research and knowledge transfer and that it would cost a great deal to address all the issues in the priority list.

The Chair suggested that for some of the priorities there is already sufficient information available which can be 'synthesised' and communicated to beekeepers (extension) while other areas would require further research. There was an extensive discussion about who should carry out and how it should be done. The Chair suggested this would have a greater impact if it was coordinated throughout the UK so the same message was given to everyone. Francis Ratnieks said he needed to reserve the right to talk about his own work. The Chair asked how we can take the list forward. Robin Dean suggested that the list should be split into categories on the basis of whether there is information available or whether hard science was needed. Wally Shaw agreed and said that the 'easy wins' versus the longer term projects such as genetics should also be considered. The Group agreed that there was duplication in the current list and Norman Carreck suggested that it could be rationalised. Stephen Martin pointed

out that some of the priorities were covered by projects being done under the Insect Pollinators Initiative.

The Group considered all of the priorities and placed them into one of three categories based on what further work was required; (1) Synthesis and dissemination required; (2) work already started; (3) research needs to be done.

DECISION: the Group agreed on which priorities had been duplicated and could be removed from the list.

DECISION: the Group agreed that the majority of the priorities require synthesis and dissemination.

ACTION: Belinda Phillipson to re draft the list of priorities removing duplication and adding categories for what further work is required. The list should then be circulated to all for comment.

ACTION: Following circulation of the redrafted list, Belinda Phillipson is to arrange a teleconference call for a subgroup consisting of Norman Carreck, David Aston, Giles Budge and Dan Basterfield to discuss with a view to drafting a paper for the extended PMB meeting in March.

4. Innovative ways of funding

The Chair suggested that synthesis/research could be funded using a similar approach to that adopted by Horticultural Development Company (HDC) working together with users to fund work. Brokers who could approach organisations/people holding other sources of funding could facilitate this.

The Chair suggested that by pooling funds, projects could be done which would overcome concerns raised by David Aston about small groups being unable to raise sufficient funds. The Chair cited the example of some of the LINK projects which had multiple funders. He suggested that there would be mechanisms in various host institutes and universities which could be used to set up such a project. David Aston was wary of this as he feels that Universities have a difficult attitude with respect to Intellectual Property.

Robin Dean suggested that a subscription could be collected from those who would be interested in getting the outputs from a synthesis activity to fund the work. There was some discussion about whether income should be generated from information or whether we should get some income to generate information. Dan Basterfield felt that at present we don't need further science but we do need translation of information that is already available. Chris Hartfield pointed out that synthesis of the information from the work done previously will also help to identify the gaps for future research. If SEAG was instrumental in the synthesis work it would help the Group to identify and agree on the gaps. David Aston thought that the associations could work together to fund synthesis type activities but felt strongly that there should be a contribution from the public purse because of the economic importance of honey bees. He pointed out that by starting small and working together would be proof of how we work. He suggested that in future SEAG could review the reports from Defra funded projects and pass on key points to HEG/CWG so this can be communicated more widely to beekeepers.

The Chair said that each research funder will have their own objectives but the HBP could be a conduit to a relevant place with business development skills. David Aston suggested that the PMB could be asked to address funding solutions but the Chair felt that SEAG should work together to identify solutions. It was suggested that this issue could be put to PMB during the extended meeting in March.

5. Certification of bees

The Chair suggested that one of the aims of the HBP was to ensure best practice. The HBP highlights the point that the sale, purchase and movement of bees should be done so that there are only minimal risks of spreading pests and diseases. The Chair asked whether these were the only activities relevant to best practice. He suggested that the ways in which colonies are produced for sale (i.e. beekeeping practices) should be considered rather than a certification scheme where bees could be made to 'look good' before they are inspected.

David Aston said that the BBKA had previously been approached about standardising the supply of bee nuclei but he supported looking at the production process. Chris Hartfield felt that it would be better to give assurances about the bee seller rather than the bees and suggested that there could be recognised producers. Dan Basterfield pointed out that several relevant questions could be posed such as what are the origins of the bees being sold, are they a swarm, from a split, a nucleus, etc. ? What is the quality of the nucleus ? What is the health of the nucleus ? Are there records of nucleus sales ? Bee sellers are not obliged to keep records to ensure traceability and he sees this as a big gap.

The Chair suggested if all beekeepers adopted good practices which can be demonstrated in an informal accreditation approach, this would overcome the risks from sales even if beekeepers were only supplying very small numbers of bees. It would also be useful to highlight the responsibilities of the buyer and the seller. There was discussion about how best to achieve this and certification versus accreditation.

David Aston felt that training and awareness is key while Stephen Martin pointed out that accreditation is a long term solution. Giles Budge said that in the short term we should raise awareness of the issue and the Group agreed. Dan Basterfield suggested that CWG should be asked to prepare a press release to be issued in the spring before people start buying bees. Wally Shaw suggested that bees should be supplied to new beekeepers as is done by the Welsh Beekeepers Association (1 colony is supplied at cost price). David Aston offered to write to BBKA members to ask where beginner beekeepers get their bees from. Bernard Diaper said that many associations were running this type of scheme but demand for bees is high. The Chair felt that this type of scheme links very well to accreditation and suggested that it would be good to test the appetite of beekeepers for an accreditation approach.

ACTION: CWG to be asked to prepare a press release for spring about what beekeepers should look for when buying bees. This document could be publicised by BBKA, NBU and BFA.

ACTION: David Aston to contact BBKA members to ask where beginner beekeepers get their bees from.

ACTION: for the group to consider development of an accreditation scheme.

6. Review of indicators

The Chair introduced the review of indicators saying that PMB had some reservations about the indicators. One of the points made was that things have been selected on the basis of whether they can be measured and not whether they are things we want to see change. The Group had a general discussion and agreed that we can have ideals of what we would like see changed but these will not always be a measure of the implementation of the HBP. The indicators were developed on the outcomes of the HBP and were therefore constrained. Stephen Martin suggested that many of the indicators are probably what would have been

chosen as measures anyway. The Chair pointed out that Indicator 1 (i) (Number of beekeepers completing husbandry courses) should actually be a proportion of association members that had completed and passed courses and exams and ideally this should show a year on year increase eventually reaching a plateau.

DECISION: The Group agreed that the Indicators were fit purpose.

ACTION: Chris Hartfield and Wally Shaw who are also members of the PMB are to feed the SEAG discussions back to PMB and ask for further clarification.

7. Response re:hypthoses sent to Defra Chief Scientists

Belinda Phillipson said that the Defra Chief Scientist has received the following two hypotheses which SEAG have been asked to consider;

- a. Whether bees could be used as biorefineries to harvest biologically active compounds, similar to 'actives' in manuka honey.
- b. Whether varroa treatments could take advantage of this harvesting role, so that in effect bees could self-treat for varroa, as long as they were foraging on plants with anti-varroa mite actives.

The Group thought that hypothesis a) was outside the remit of the HBP. The second hypothesis was thought to be linked to the idea of planting thyme bushes (containing thymol) round apiaries so that bees could self treat but it was felt that if this approach had been successful it would have been adopted before.

8. Review of SEAG and future working arrangements

The Chair said that the first phase of the HBP was coming to a close and future working arrangements are being reviewed. He asked the Group for comments on how they felt the group had worked. David Aston said that we had developed ways of working and were starting to develop and deliver things. Francis Ratnieks wondered if the process could be streamlined, for instance would it be possible to use video conferencing ? He suggested that as the group had got to know each other it was easier to talk and therefore meetings could be held less often. The Chair thought that the group has achieved a lot but noted that some of this had been done through subgroups. He said that the Agenda always feels long but felt that Science and Advice are key to the HBP. Stephen Martin said that the Group never got time to look at reports or get its teeth into things. There was a general feeling that the Group was getting somewhere.

Healthy Bees Project Team
Fera

21st January, 2011

Action Number	Action	Person(s) responsible
1	To send a summary of the 3 rd SEAG meeting to the Devolved Administrations and to arrange for the summary to be posted on BeeBase	Belinda Phillipson
2	To re draft the list of priorities removing duplication and adding categories. The list should then be circulated to all for comment.	Belinda Phillipson
3	Following circulation of the redrafted list, Belinda Phillipson is to arrange a teleconference call for a subgroup to discuss with a view to drafting a paper for the extended PMB meeting in March.	Belinda Phillipson Norman Carreck David Aston Giles Budge Dan Basterfield
4	To prepare a press release for spring about what beekeepers should look for when buying bees.	CWG
5	To contact BBKA members to ask where beginner beekeepers get their bees from.	David Aston
6	To consider development of an accreditation scheme	All depending on future working arrangements
7	To feedback the discussion on Indicators to PMB and ask for further clarification	Chris Hartfield and Wally Shaw