

Minutes of the meeting of the animal health expert group on bee health

13 January 2017, Brussels

1. Approval of the agenda

An annotated draft agenda¹ was circulated prior to the meeting and agreed at the beginning.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public. The Member States' and EEA countries representatives from the competent veterinary authorities and in addition representatives from the European Reference Laboratory for bee health were participating in the meeting, the latter on an ad-hoc basis due to the need for specific expertise. Aims of the meeting are detailed in the "Notes" section of the annotated agenda (its page 2).

3. List of points discussed

1. Small hive beetle (SHB) situation in the EU

- a. Information on SHB aspects of audit DG(SANTE)2016-8759 (SANTE F2).

[Presentation delivered by the Commission representative](#)

- b. Information from Italy on SHB.

[Presentation delivered by the Italian representative](#)

- c. Exchange of views, discussion and roundtable with Member States (MS)

The discussion subsequent to the two presentations was very lively and lasted long, touching many aspects of the Italian efforts against SHB, mainly MS asking and the Italian representatives answering. They covered, *inter alia*, number and location of hives in infected zones, how to register and keep count of apiaries and hives, necessary manpower from competent authorities to fight SHB, handling of transhumance, measure in the protection and surveillance zones, protocols for sentinel hives, their density, placement and management, treatment of soil in infected apiaries (chemical and physical), diagnostic methods in apiaries (physical, visual controls of hives and PCR on debris), general attitude of beekeepers, also as linked to passive surveillance (notification of SHB), financial compensation to beekeepers, cooperation with beekeeping organisations, use of traps to catch SHB, movement records and checks thereof, and measures in the rest of Italy.

The MS appreciated the expertise, thoroughness and openness of Italy in answering all the questions and claimed to have learned a lot from them, and indeed from each other too, mainly from the various questions stated and some opinions shared.

Many MS indicated that they will step up their efforts one way or other to be better prepared if, and when, SBH arrives into their countries. The Commission fully supported these indications, as this unfortunate event could easily happen and during the meeting only 7 MS claimed to have some sort of contingency plan for SHB.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/ah_expert-group_bee_20170113_agenda.pdf

2. Intra-EU trade and import rules for honey bees and bumble bees (and beyond)

- a. Information on the context on and details of future work under the EU Animal Health Law (AHL) (SANTE G2).

[Presentation delivered by the Commission representative](#)

- b. Information on fact-finding bee health audits in Austria, Romania, Spain and Italy (SANTE F2).

[Presentation delivered by the Commission representative](#)

- c. Exchange of views, discussion and roundtable with MS

During the subsequent exchange Italy again emphasised the specificities of the apiculture sector making it different from other kept animals and that the approach by the EU and veterinary services also must take into account those, in light of limited resources. France mentioned their own national disease assessment and categorisation exercise. Other topics were grouped into several bigger categories focused, but not restricted, by the [presentation by SANTE G2](#).

- Bumble bees, intra-EU trade thereof

The opinion of those MS which spoke was that bumble bees should be regulated separately from honey bees for two significant reasons: (i) their susceptibility to various pathogens is different and (ii) their production and use is very different, namely they are produced in the EU on industrial scale in only a few biosecure, environmentally isolated establishments. It seems that such production is limited only to a few MS while other MS recipients of them. The Commission supported different regulation and handling, especially that for imports this is already the case² but also noted that given the relative lack of regulated/listed diseases which bumblebees are susceptible to, there is little to regulate. Some of the issues raised by this and various other fora do not pertain to EU animal health rules (e.g. alleged spread of non-regulated diseases by industrially produced bumblebees, genetic effects caused on the field on wild bumblebees by produced ones, bumblebee boxes on the field acting as source or reservoirs for certain pathogens and such).

- American foulbrood (AFB): handling on-site and intra-EU trade aspects

The Commission raised in the presentation by SANTE F2 (point b. above) that while handling of the infected apiary is straightforward, handling of its environment in the radius of 3 km may be problematic if national rules do not provide for updated information in real-time on the location of the apiaries. Lack of cooperation or notification by beekeepers and possible own-treatments are other issues which may be present but there are only anecdotal data about that. The MS which spoke confirmed that AFB legally may be handled in various ways on their territory, based on national rules (colonies may not be destroyed all the time, some differences in technical details), but all confirmed that measures are done to the satisfaction of the competent authority and handling around the infected apiary does not pose problems either. None mentioned AFB caused by incoming intra-EU trade consignments. Hence current wording in the intra-EU trade certificate is largely fitting. UK mentioned however some irregularities observed with certification for incoming consignments, related to official controls and attestations at the places of origin. Bilateral contacts are pursued to clarify and prevent such.

² Imports rules are understood to be working well, hence were not discussed

- Small hive beetle

All agreed that the current regulations are adequate from that point of view that leaves to the MS the actual handling of SHB outbreaks within their country and it was taken for granted that every MS would have a protection zone and a surveillance zone around and would attempt to eradicate SHB, should it appear. All agreed also, that current trade rules could be fine-tuned, in particular for trade of queens. As regards the current intra-EU trade certificate, those who spoke agreed that the radius of the area restricted (100km in radius from outbreaks) could be reduced, especially as the epidemiological situation gets clearer, but for the immediate the 100 km radius must also be maintained. Active surveillance on the given area(s) is an important factor in the reduction, i.e. reliable active surveillance by EU guidelines must be present and must be applied also beyond the restricted areas.

- Development of the sector and other topics

Under this point a diverse range of elements were discussed. Overall the participants did not see major and/or any specific development in the sector recently or in the near future which would necessitate significant policy development (except the industrial production of bumblebees already mentioned above). One MS raised the need to develop rules for consignments containing a queen with more than 20 attendants. Apparently there is no interest and/or information about the use of other *Apis* species in the EU (e.g. *A. cerana*). There is seemingly no need to regulate cross-border transhumance in any special way. While various *A. mellifera* subspecies (some are from mass produced queens) are used by beekeepers and there are some concerns about that and/or the loss of regional subspecies, the Commission highlighted that this is not an animal health issue. Similarly, several MS raised problems with use of wax contaminated with various residues (pesticides or/and acaricides) or the use of fraudulent wax. These do not belong to the animal health area either, as per the EU rules on transmissible diseases.

4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

As regards the morning session many MS expressed several times that the session was very useful for them to learn about many aspects (legal, financial, practical, epidemiological, logistical etc.) of direct Italian experiences in trying to fight and if possible eradicate SHB from their territories. They appreciated the expertise, the thoroughness and openness of Italy in answering all the questions. Many MS indicated that they will step up their efforts one way or other to be better prepared if, and when, SBH arrives into their countries. The Commission fully supported these indications, as during the meeting only 7 MS claimed to have some sort of contingency plan for SHB.

As regards the afternoon, Commission obtained useful information on the current situation in the Union in relation to apiculture sector, the perception of the MS about the fitness of the current intra-EU trade and import rules as well as some expectations of Members States for future legislation. In turn it gave some indications of what elements may be fine-tuned. It also clarified that while some issues raised may affect the wider area of bee health, they do not pertain to the specific area of animal health defined by the scope of current EU legislation and in particular to the EU AHL. The Commission indicated that follow-up to this meeting will take place in several ways: the prolongation of the Commission Decision on current safeguard measures but the deletion of Sicily from the list of restricted zones will be proposed for vote to MS and subsequent adoption by the Commission (*NOTE*: done since³), some fine-tuning to the intra-EU bee health certificate will be attempted in the coming months in the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF), while more thorough review is planned under the work for delegated and implementing acts under the AHL.

³ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2017/370 of 1 March 2017, L 56/213, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32017D0370>

5. Next steps

The outcome of the discussion and opinions provided by the participants of this expert group will be used by the Commission in the context of the Animal Health and Welfare Section of the SCoPAFF and during further Commission work towards delegated acts under AHL.

6. Next meeting

There is no further meeting established on this topic.










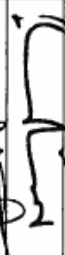


7. List of participants

See next 3 pages.


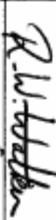




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