



The British Beekeepers' Association

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To all Association Secretaries and ADM Delegates

12th December 2009

I write to update you on developments in relation to the BBKA Executive's decision to withdraw from the Project Board of the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA)'s Healthy Bee Plan initiative as it felt that the voices of beekeepers in general and the BBKA in particular were not being listened to. In summary we felt that there is no point in expending time and effort in participating in a process over which it seemed to have no influence.

As the board is currently constituted, beekeepers (whether in the BBKA or other beekeeping organisations) have little say in what is done. We are consulted, ie, we are invited to make comments and these comments are largely ignored. This is extremely frustrating and led us to withdraw to concentrate on our own work for the immediate needs of beekeeping that we can, of course, influence and control. Early examples of this are our Healthy Hive Guide, which won a gold medal at Apimondia in the multimedia class.

At the forthcoming ADM, a proposition has been put forward which, if passed, would instruct the BBKA to rejoin the project board. The Executive of the BBKA remains committed to the overall aims of the Healthy Bee Plan, but there is no point in participating in a process over which it has no influence. To go to a meeting to listen to what we are told serves little purpose. The information can be gained by simply reading the minutes which are publicly available. If FERA is actually prepared to accept that the BBKA has something to offer in terms of how moneys should be spent and what the priorities should be, then there is every point in participating. After all, it was in no small measure due to the campaigning of the BBKA that there is money to be spent in the first place!

Since our withdrawal we have had several meetings with the Minister, Lord Davies and FERA officials to try to reach agreement on a way in which our views can be listened to. These have produced some early signs of movement by FERA and we remain hopeful that we can arrive a suitable negotiated settlement in the not too distant future. Passing the proposition will severely weaken our position as it will mean being told by our members to accept whatever we are offered by FERA.

Defeating the motion will send a message to FERA that the BBKA membership supports the Executive in fighting to get the best possible deal for its membership.

Given that we anticipate further negotiations with FERA between now and the ADM in January we would ask associations to consider giving their delegate discretion to listen the up to date position from the Executive at the ADM itself and not to mandate their delegate to vote for the proposition on what at this stage would be incomplete and probably out of date information.

Finally, you may have had an email from FERA in relation to a proposal to provide a subsidy for beekeepers who enrol on a City & Guilds course. The BBKA does have reservations about putting too much emphasis on such courses which could conceivably lead to a situation where beekeeping courses could only be run at colleges if the tutor has this City & Guilds qualification. The ability to teach competently is obviously important, but we should not do anything that restricts the willingness of the wide range of experienced beekeepers who give up their time freely to train their fellow beekeepers. It is regrettable that FERA did not discuss this initiative with us given its direct effect on our membership, bearing in mind that we have been in regular contact with them .

There is a further important element here to consider. As you know the BBKA gives strict undertakings in relation to personal data provided for the BBKA Members Register. We do not divulge this information to third parties. If you received the email from FERA, this was obtained from the public section of our website - where we have a list of associations with addresses and emails supplied by yourselves to allow the public to make contact with you individually. It was not set up as a method of allowing 3rd parties to generate a mailing list, but obviously this is possible and the data was extracted and used without our express permission.. With the possible exception of Phil Chandler (Biobee) we are not aware that any other organisation or individual has generated a email list in this way. If however you do not want this situation to arise again, I would ask you to let Steve Turner our Web Master to remove your email contact details from the public section of our website. In this case, we can arrange for a message from a member of the public to be forwarded by the office to you rather than sent directly thus avoiding your email being in the public domain.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Martin Smith". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Martin Smith
BBKA Chairman