Notes from consultation meeting with the Apiary Industry Disease Committee

Subject: Draft Varroa Action Plan

121 Main st Sheffield, 19 July 2024, Chair: Peter Norris

Actions	AIDC

1.1. Review and improve import requirements, including:
a) Move from the current General Biosecurity Direction (Emergency) to permanent import requirements that balance risk with least trade restrictive controls.
b) Assess the need for and consider actions to enable safe trade in queen bees, this may reduce the risk of illegal imports.
	• No comment on 1.1(a)
	• Strong comments on 1.1(b) – Queen bees with a split view that there was no safe way to bring in queen bees.
	  • Peter Norris reflected this part of the action plan should be deleted.
	  • Lindsay Bourke indicated this would make it hard for some people and queried the risk associated with imports from Northern QLD or Western Australia. He also reflected that if a beekeeper has a lot of hives, it may be difficult to get early queens.
	  • Several members considered that there are great genetics here in Tasmania and do not need imports.
	  • Ability to bring drone semen in was acknowledged.
	  • Concerns expressed about the time and money it takes to breed queens – some thought it was doable, and others considered it was difficult to breed in volume and that more research was needed.

1.2. Undertake risk assessments[1] to guide decision making.	This work was acknowledged. No issues raised.
1.3. Review varroa entry pathways into Tasmania.	• Cut flowers as a pathway was raised by several in attendance. Peter Norris noted that this was a pathway that saw the introduction of Varroa into England, but indicated that the information he had was verbal/anecdotal and from the early 1990s. He agreed he would look into it more and try to get information across to BT. • Jamie confirmed that cut flowers would be considered further through the Import Risk Analysis. • Irradiation was raised as a potential risk mitigation but the impact on the cut flowers was unknown. • Online – a comment was made that Stanely needs to be looked into regarding cattle coming in for small hive beetle.
1.4. Participate in Transition to Management decision making at the national level through the Consultative Committee for Emergency Plant Pests, National Management Group and Plant Health Committee (including subcommittees).	No comments raised on action plan.
1.5. Ensure/enforce compliance with import requirements and other biosecurity obligations.	No comments raised on action plan.
2.1. Review barrier inspections and consider improvements, including: a) Imprint detector dogs on bees to better detect bees at the border.	• Concerns regarding the inspection levels of containers in the north was raised. • No other comments raised.

[1] Includes rapid risk assessments (2022, 2024), CEBRA report (in progress), assessments through Subcommittee on Market Access and Trade (SMART), full Varroa Pest Risk Analysis (in progress, dependent on completion of former items).

Actions	AIDC
b) Consider methods to detect bee colonies on ships and shipping containers such as trialling thermal imaging cameras.	
2.2. Improve post border varroa surveillance activities, including: a) Develop and implement short- and long-term surveillance plans[2]. b) Develop and maintain a robust apiary industry and recreational beekeeper surveillance program. c) Improve the capacity for rapid reporting of surveillance results and suspect detections. d) Launch BeeTAS registration to facilitate self-reporting. e) Investigate facilitating traceability of hive movements.	• There were no specific concerns raised about the content of action plan (item 2.2) but participants spoke to surveillance and traceability. • Ability to effectively trace hives when sold/moved was questioned from within the room. Suggestion was that there was a gap in record keeping that would impact traceability. Phil Godman (Biosecurity Tasmania) outlined beekeeper record keeping requirements related to hive movements are detailed in the Australian Honeybee Industry Code of Practice (see section 5.1). • It was queried whether BT could do surveillance (alcohol washes) at a certain level to provide confidence in the results. Jamie noted biosecurity was a joint effort and there was an opportunity to more effectively record data arising from activities already undertaken by beekeepers rather than introducing new activities/resources. • The need for methods to support growers that were not digitally savvy was noted
2.3. Improve diagnostics and detection methods: a) Maintain and build diagnostic capability for varroa mite. b) Investigate rapid methods of varroa detection (eg molecular testing, eDNA, visual recognition technology, remote sensing technology).	No comments raised on action plan.
2.4. Improve the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania internal reporting, BeeTAS and Laboratory Information Management Systems.	No comments raised on action plan.
3.1. Develop a Tasmanian specific contingency plan for varroa mite.	• Considered of high importance and urgent. • Importance in considering pollination impacts regarding any lock down was emphasised. • Importance of running scenarios asap. • Reinfestation was noted a key issue, with 2-3 years need to get 'balance' in the environment/treatment levels (as observed from the mainland by those that have connections there). • Issues seen in the NSW response, such as aerial poisoning and non-compliance behaviour were flagged as hard questions and critical to have upfront and considered early.

[2] A summary of a surveillance plan will be included in the final version of this action plan as an appendix.

Actions	AIDC
3.2. Pre-establish a list of trained Industry Liaison Officers and people trained in handling bees.	No comments raised on action plan.
3.3. Undertake preparedness activities (eg simulation exercises).	No comments raised on action plan.
3.4. Undertake a scenario analysis to pre plan different scenarios in the event of varroa detections in Tasmania.	• Comments general in nature throughout the consultation. Importance of identifying what the response strategy would be emphasised. • Lindsay reflected concerns about recreational beekeepers being present within 3km of a port and considered they shouldn't be there. Peter noted that this is not where the incursion happened in NSW. • Comments indicated a desire for rapid decision making
3.5. Investigate optimising traceability of hive movements.	• Comment that there is a potential traceability gap with buying, selling and gifting hives. • See also comments in 2.2.
4.1. Develop a communication plan incorporating: a) Increased awareness of varroa and beekeeper self-surveillance/reporting through BeeTAS b) Industry and recreational beekeeper involvement in development of strategy/action plan. c) Industry/beekeeper involvement in surveillance. d) Develop a client management information system.	No comments raised on action plan.
4.2. Undertake stakeholder engagement including: a) Create a Tasmanian Varroa Mite Task Force to advance and promote industry surveillance activities. Membership to include representatives from Biosecurity Tasmania, beekeeper industries, and pollination dependent industries (eg Fruit Growers Tasmania). b) Engagement of shipping and transport industries to educate on swarm detection and encourage reporting of swarms. c) Engagement of Australia Post and courier companies regarding live bee imports.	• Supported the formation of a task force • 4.3(c) – comment raised about ensuring focus on queen bees too.

Actions	AIDC
d) Determine the best mechanisms for bringing experienced beekeepers into a response. e) Enhance stakeholder contact information management.	
4.3. Identification of market access opportunities (domestic or export) for maintaining varroa free production (eg Queen bee exports).	No comments raised on action plan.
4.4. Investigate mechanisms to establish volunteer engagement.	No comments raised on action plan.
5.1. Plan B: Action areas are based on the National Varroa Mite Transition to Management Plan, and includes the following: a) Building industry resilience b) Slowing the spread of varroa mite c) Future ready industries	No comments raised on action plan (above what already commented on)
Additional comments	• A major concern for the beekeeping community is compensation or reimbursement for hives destroyed if an emergency response to varroa mite aimed at eradication is actioned by Biosecurity Tasmania. If compensation or reimbursement is not available, it was considered that there is a heightened risk of non-compliance. Reimbursement is an important tool to enhance compliance during a potential emergency response for varroa mite.

Commented [SD1]: Duplication of information so have removed first dot point.