

AHB SAG Minutes

Meeting Five of the Asian Honey Bee Scientific Advisory Group (AHB SAG)

Teleconference held on Wednesday 5th April 2012

Attendees: Rod Turner PHA (Chair), Sam Malfroy PHA (Secretariat), Denis Anderson CSIRO, Simon Barry CSIRO, Glynn Maynard DAFF, Doug Somerville NSW DPI, Trevor Weatherhead AHBIC, Max Whitten FCAAA, Boris Baer UWA (all following attendees joined the meeting as observers) Dave Alden RIRDC, Russell Gilmour DEEDI, Shirin Hyatt DEEDI and Anna Koetz DEEDI.

Apologies: Sharon De Wet DEEDI, Neil O'Brien DEEDI

Item 1: Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed the Members of the Asian Honey Bee Scientific Advisory Group (AHB SAG) to the teleconference.

Item 2: Pest and Disease preliminary research proposals

Three preliminary research proposals (PRP's) were tabled for discussion. A conflict of interest was declared by Dr Anderson. However, all Members of the SAG and the Chair endorsed Dr Anderson to make an independent and impartial assessment of the technical aspects of the PRP's received for the pest and disease research.

The technical and scientific aspects of the three pest and disease PRP's were discussed amongst the SAG. The SAG agreed with the advice provided by the RIRDC Honeybee Committee and believed that the Roberts PRP would effectively deliver the scientific outcomes that are required for the AHB T2M within the timeline and budget that is being sought. It was discussed that the deep sequence and bioassay proposed in the PRP should be an acceptable methodology to help potentially re-establish trade in live honey bee exports. The SAG endorsed that this PRP be made into a Full Research Proposal (FRP).

Item 3: Attractants for *Apis cerana* research proposals

Two PRP's were tabled and discussed amongst the SAG and BQ. All Members agreed that the Guez proposal effectively included Cairns plants that were considered attractive to AHB, as well specific overseas orchids. The SAG believed that the Guez PRP was scientifically sound and that it would deliver an effective means to help manage AHB into the future. However, concern was raised over the 3 year timeline that was proposed for the research.

Due to the timelines of the AHB T2M, the SAG requested that the when writing a FRP, the researcher for the attractant research should cut the timeline down to 2 years and that some aspects of the project be simplified, such as the work on overseas orchids, to reflect this shortened timeline. However, the SAG requested that this extra work be

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placed into an optional 3rd year of funding for research to take place if the results are promising.

The Senior Research Manager of the RIRDC Honeybee Committee, Dr Dave Alden, stated that when these proposals were considered at the last RIRDC Honeybee Committee meeting, the option of using a honey based attractant was discussed as an alternative to the PRP's received. It was stated that this research would be less risky than developing an attractant, and that honey is a known attractant to honey bees. However, members of the SAG who have had extensive experience with the Asian honey bee (Java strain) stated that this has been tried, both in the Torres Strait and the Solomon Islands without success. DEEDI added that two techniques were tried in the original Cairns incursion using these principles. The first was melting beeswax and honey with an odour flume and the second was by leaving out sticky supers. However, both methods failed to attract any AHB. All members of the SAG agreed that developing a specific attractant was the best way to proceed and strongly supported that the Guez PRP be made into a FRP, including the recommended changes.

The Chair stated that according to the contracts the \$400,000 contributed by the Honey bee industry (\$200,000 from both AHBIC and FCAAA) would have to be spent on projects in the AHB T2M by the 30th of June 2013 and because of this, the proposed 3 year project would be hard to fund in its entirety. Some Members of the SAG expressed frustration at the timelines proposed and stated that completing complicated research with a set date does not take into consideration many of the unexpected complications that inevitably arise with research. Members also expressed frustration that the June 2013 completion dates was always predicated by the 1st of July 2011 start date, which did not happen. Members stated that the 2 year timeline should only commence when projects begin, not from the July 2011 dates.

It was proposed that if a project was considered that had a timeline that finished past the 30th June 2013 end date, that money could come from other sources, such as the RIRDC Honeybee Committee to continue the research. The Senior Research Manager of the RIRDC Honeybee Committee, Dr Dave Alden agreed that this was a possibility.

The Chair acknowledged that he was unsure whether it would be acceptable to allocate money for projects that ran past the end date of the AHB T2M. The Chair agreed to seek clarification on this issue with the Chair of Transition Management Group (TMG) and would provide a formal response to the SAG and BQ about the level of movement that is allowed between projects timelines and money allocated to these projects.

Item 4: Consultant strategy to address Australian honey bee imports

Three PRP's were tabled for discussion. The SAG agreed with the advice provided by the RIRDC Honeybee Committee and felt that the Clarke PRP would be the most beneficial to the AHB T2M and that it would deliver these outcomes in a timely and cost effective manner.

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The SAG stated that the FRP should include discussions with the DAFF biosecurity section that deals with honey bee import/export because they would be aware of concerns of countries that import Australian honey bee. The SAG added that discussions should also take place with the lead researcher of the pest and disease research project linked to the AHB T2M. Dr Alden agreed to take these comments back to the lead researcher.

Item 5: Full Research Proposals

The FRP received by Dr Ben Oldroyd regarding the interspecific mating ability between *Apis cerana* Java strain and *Apis mellifera* was tabled. The SAG agreed with the advice provided by the RIRDC Honeybee Committee and believed that this project would provide valuable answers to a potential mating problem that could arise with the honey bee industry, as well as provide knowledge that would be critical in the future management of the AHB by industry. The SAG supported that the FRP go ahead.

The FRP received by Dr Ben Oldroyd regarding the sex alleles of the *Apis cerana* Java strain was tabled. The SAG stated that work similar to this is already being conducted by DEEDI in alignment with the AHB T2M. However, the SAG felt that if money was left over within the AHB T2M then this would be a useful project to fund as it would provide answers to the invasiveness of this species which would aid future management. It was agreed to put this research on the action list and revisit in future meetings.

Item 6: Preliminary remote nest treatments conducted on 5 AHB nests by Biosecurity Queensland

The preliminary Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) report titled "*Asian Honey Bee Remote Nest Treatment: results from 5 nests*" was tabled and the results and details of the report were discussed by BQ and the SAG. The results of the preliminary remote nest treatment were promising with 5 nests so far being treated, with 2 nests being destroyed and the other 3 being suppressed to very low levels of AHB activity. BQ stated that they are continuing to monitor the activity very closely of the three remaining AHB nests.

It was noted that some nests had been attacked by green tree ants. The SAG expressed concern about the possible residual effects of Fipronil on the green tree ant colonies when 'cleaning out' old AHB nests and stores. The SAG requested that BQ look into how serious this possible non-target effect could be, and to potentially conduct some preliminary research into the possible effects of Fipronil on green ants that 'clean out' old AHB nests and stores.

Biosecurity Queensland stated that as the dry season begins in Cairns that more AHB nests will be able to be trialled for remote treatment, however, stated that they were unsure about the future direction of variables that should be tested. The SAG discussed the possibility of starting to measure the effect of variables such as a lower dose rate of Fipronil, or distance from the feeding station to the nest, however, agreed that the next nests should continue to focus on determining the level of forager numbers to suppress an AHB nest of a certain size. Biosecurity Queensland agreed with this suggestion and

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the Chair stated that any updates from BQ or feedback from the SAG regarding the remote nest treatments should be coordinated through PHA.

All Members of the SAG congratulated BQ for the effort in preparing a scientific and thorough research report into the use of Fipronil to remotely suppress AHB nests.

Item 9: Future Meetings

The Chair stated that PHA would follow up with all Members of SAG if there is a development in regards to the research proposals or the remote nest treatments. All Members agreed to follow up with PHA if they wished for any minor changes to be made.

Item 10: Summary and close of meeting

The Chair thanked all Members of the SAG for attending the teleconference and closed the meeting.