

## AHB SAG Minutes

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

Teleconference held on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2012

**Attendees:** Sam Malfroy (Chair), Stephen Dibley PHA, Alison Cleary PHA, Simon Barry CSIRO, Doug Somerville NSW DPI, Trevor Weatherhead AHBIC, Boris Baer UWA, Max Whitten FCAAA (the following attendees joined the meeting as observers) Neil O'Brien DAFF Queensland, Mike Ashton DAFF Queensland, Russell Gilmour DAFF Queensland and Anna Koetz DAFF Queensland.

**Apologies:** Rod Turner PHA, Glynn Maynard DAFF and Denis Anderson Bees Down-under

#### Item 1: Welcome and introduction by the Chair

The Chair welcomed the Members of the Asian Honey Bee Scientific Advisory Group (AHB SAG) to the teleconference. The Chair passed to Neil O'Brien of BQ to explain to the SAG the recent changes in management of the AHB T2M. Mr O'Brien explained that he would no longer be managing the AHB T2M in BQ, and instead the management of this program would change to Mike Ashton, Director of Plant Biosecurity and Product Integrity (DAFF Queensland), from the start of October 2012.

Mr Ashton introduced himself to the SAG and explained his past experiences in similar programs, including Citrus Canker, Sugarcane Smut and Papaya fruit fly eradication programs. Mr Ashton stated that there would be no changes to ground activities and staff of the AHB T2M.

#### Item 2: Remote nest treatment – recent developments

The Chair provided an explanation to the group regarding the recent developments with the remote nest treatments. The Chair stated that PHA had written a letter to both the APVMA and BASF on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August and attached the recently completed BQ Fipronil report. The letter to both of these companies requested their view of the trials currently being undertaken, as well as whether both would support the possible registration of a Fipronil based product after the AHB T2M for beekeepers to use to control AHB. The Chair stated that the APVMA provided a response that they would review the BQ document, but no further word had been received from either APVMA or BASF.

The Chair stated that PHA had been informed that BASF still control the toxilogical package to Fipronil, and their approval would be required for possible registration of any future product. Mr Weatherhead stated that he understood differently, and BASF no longer controlled the toxilogical package. There was discussion amongst the group on this issue, specifically regarding the registration of another Fipronil based product called Apithor for the honey bee industry. The Chair and Mr Weatherhead agreed to continue this discussion out of session.

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There was frustration with some members of the SAG that remote nest treatments had not been conducted since July 2012. The Chair stated that BQ will not be initiating any new remote nest treatments until a response, and a position, had been received from the APVMA and BASF, or unless more information regarding who owns the toxicological package was obtained. Once this has occurred, a SAG will be held to discuss the future of the remote nest treatments, including the variables tested, the concentration of Fipronil used as well as the design of the bait stations used.

### **Item 3: DAFF Queensland literature review - summary**

The Chair opened up the discussion of the literature review by stating that this formed part of AG Project 3 of the AHB T2M. The Chair explained that the objectives of the literature review were to:

- Engage with apiarists in the Cairns region who have had experience with both honey bees.
- Conduct an analysis to understand what is known and not known about AHB in relation to mating, behaviour, foraging habits, weather impacts etc.
- Compare the behaviour between AHB and European honey bees to identify opportunities that support differential control methods.

The Chair stated that the literature review effectively highlighted knowledge gaps in the Java genotype, provided a context of the Java genotype within *Apis cerana* and also allowed research agencies to focus R&D efforts to areas that are not currently known. The Chair added that this literature review is a neutral document which had been compiled by peer reviewed scientific information.

Dr Koetz (BQ author of the literature review) stated that over 300 references were used in this literature review. Dr Koetz added that Professor Ben Oldroyd had reviewed the document and passed on some minor editorial comments which had been incorporated, as well as highlighting that *Apis cerana javana* is not the correct taxonomy for the bee in Cairns. Dr Koetz also mentioned that Dr David Guez was reviewing the literature and would be providing comments in the near future.

Dr Koetz also stated that comments had been received by Dr Denis Anderson out of session, also highlighting that *Apis cerana javana* is incorrect, and instead, the bee should be called *Apis cerana* Java genotype as it is not a recognised subspecies. Other comments from Dr Anderson included that BQ should work with students from nearby educational organisation to study various aspects of this bees biology, as very few references from overseas on this bee can be compared to the Cairns situation. Dr Koetz stated that BQ had already acted on this, and there were currently 3 Honours/Masters students from James Cook University conducting experiments and assisting BQ.

Dr Koetz discussed with the group that the amount of literature of *Apis cerana* Java genotype was very limited, and was either untranslatable or inaccessible. Because of this, a literature review solely focusing on *Apis cerana* Java genotype would not be possible. Dr Koetz added that placing a bee such as this within the context of *Apis*

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*cerana* and *Apis mellifera* (which is managed in Australia) is crucial to understand it fully, as well as to understand a possible future incursion of *Apis cerana*.

Dr Koetz discussed with the SAG that if any other references were available, then she would be more than happy to include them in the literature review.

### **Item 4: Discussion – literature review**

Dr Koetz stated she had had a few discussions with Dr Anderson about possibilities on why this bee behaves differently in the Solomon Islands and Cairns. The SAG requested that some of this information be included in the literature review as personal communication referenced material. The Chair agreed with this suggestion and stated that personal communication with Dr Anderson and Mr Annand (NSW DPI) could help build on this literature review, as very little published information is available on this bee.

Mr Weatherhead expressed serious concerns regarding some of the conclusions drawn in the literature review, and that it mislead readers in its assumptions of the Java genotype, by drawing conclusions from other *Apis cerana* subspecies. Mr Weatherhead discussed with the group that the literature review was asked to be done for *Apis cerana* Java genotype, not AHB in general, or even *Apis mellifera*. Mr Weatherhead also raised the issue that the work in PNG and the Solomon Islands was not given enough prominence in the literature review, as well as the Indonesian Master's report into this bee not being purchased or translated. In summary, Mr Weatherhead stated that as an Industry representative, that he did not support the literature review.

Mr Weatherhead also noted that that sections of the research recommendations contained in the literature review, such as the breeding *Apis cerana* Java genotype for honey production or selective breeding, would not only contravene various state Apiary Act's, but also highlighted that Industry would not want to go down this avenue. Dr Koetz stated that the literature review is not recommending this, but is merely expressing what the literature states, as similar advancements had been made with *Apis mellifera*. Mr Weatherhead also expressed that the *Apis mellifera* section should be completed with more relevant information. Dr Koetz stated that she would be more than happy to include other references, but these would have to be provided by Mr Weatherhead.

The Chair reiterated to the SAG what was originally requested in the project scope of AG Project 3, and that this literature review had exceeded what was requested of BQ. Some members of the SAG agreed that this was a very comprehensive literature review, and that with constructive feedback from the SAG, then this literature review could be improved. The Chair also mentioned that this literature review was an important project of AG Project 3 for Biosecurity Queensland to complete. The Chair added that it was desired that this literature review be completed with all possible feedback from the SAG, so this milestone could be achieved, and payment made to BQ within an appropriate timeframe so that other projects in the AHB T2M could be commenced and completed.

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BQ stated that they would be happy to amend sections of the literature review from SAG recommendations once approved by the TMG. The Chair stated that a list of SAG recommendations would be presented to the TMG from this meeting. Dr Koetz stated she would be happy to work with the SAG to make these amendments, such as changing the title of the literature review and also including a specific section on work completed on this bee in PNG and the Solomon Islands, as well as compiling some personal communication referenced material for the literature review. BQ also stated that they would look into getting the Indonesian Master's document translated for future inclusion into the literature review.

It was acknowledged amongst the SAG and BQ that very little information is currently present on *Apis cerana* Java genotype. A suggestion was put forward to amend the current lit review and release it, but keep a copy of the literature review as a 'living document' with version control to gradually incorporate more knowledge of the bee as it comes to hand. The Chair agreed with this statement and suggested that the industry funded projects into pest and disease situation, attractants, interspecific mating and drone congregation areas would all yield valuable information that could be included in the future.

### **Item 5: Summary and close of meeting**

The Chair thanked BQ, specifically Dr Koetz, for the literature review and also thanked the SAG for attending the teleconference and providing valuable feedback and comments.

Neil O'Brien thanked Dr Koetz on behalf of BQ for the literature review that had been conducted. Dr Koetz thanked the SAG for their comments and stated that the SAG recommendations agreed to by the AHB TMG would be easy to incorporate into a final literature review that could be released by the end of October. The Chair also thanked Mr O'Brien for the role he has played in the AHB T2M and wished him well for future projects.

The Chair requested that if Members of the SAG had any further comments, then these should be sent to PHA ASAP. The Chair closed the meeting.