



# SABIO

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## **Press release from SABIO Chairman regarding the status of AFB regulations.**

Comment and debate regarding the situation as far as regulations and biosecurity measures necessary to control the AFB outbreak in South Africa since its discovery in February 2009 have been widely circulated at meetings, amongst beekeepers, in the SA Bee Journal, on the SABIO web site and in the press since it arrived in Cape Town. I feel that it is necessary to inform all beekeepers and the public in general of what has happened since the outbreak of the disease to try and create some pattern in the development regulating the disease. My intention is remind role-players of how events have developed and obtain some clarity regarding measures that need to be introduced in the near future. Often one person's perspective considers the problem from one point of view, which makes it difficult to see the broader picture. Finger pointing and blame quickly takes one's eye of the real problems and this leads to a stalemate and parties who should be working in harmony pulling in different directions. I have no doubt about the sincerity and passion of comments, and all involved are seriously trying to find the best way forward.

The main role players are: The government DoA/DAFF and the ARC.

The beekeeping industry represented by SABIO.

The phases that can now be identified:

1. Initial request for regulations, inspectors, quarantine and standstill for eradication of AFB.
2. Pollination as a priority service to fruit growers
3. Interim survey to assess spread of AFB.
4. Realization that AFB will have to be accepted and managed by beekeepers.
5. Implementation of suitable regulations to control and manage AFB.

## **1. Initial request for regulations, inspectors, quarantine and standstill for eradication of AFB.**

I need to remind role players of developments so far to dispel any notion of excluding a group from exposure to developments around the AFB issue.

In the SA Bee Journal April/May vol 81 No 1 2009 on page 4, I wrote (all these comments were also posted on the SABIO web site):

“There are some misunderstandings regarding the control of AFB in South Africa. The first is that all beekeepers need to realize that it is a notifiable disease and that the ultimate decision regarding its control lies with the Dept of Agriculture. Beekeepers are entitled to express any opinions they please about the measures they feel should be implemented but ultimately we are governed by the legislation that governs us based on our constitution. We may not agree with imposed laws but if we break them then we are guilty of an offence and liable for prosecution. The problem is that, as yet, we have never had an outbreak of AFB so legislation is not in place to control it. This means that in order to stop the spread of the disease enforcement will at present depend on orders given to specific beekeepers and regulations that will be promulgated as soon as possible, which may not be that soon, or too late to contain the spread AFB.”

Followed by:

“Beekeepers who were identified with AFB were fully co-operative and provided samples of brood, site visits by Mike and checked on other sites themselves. The assumption remains that the infection started by some honey being imported which was not irradiated and empty drums were subsequently cleaned by bees and the spores picked up and spread back to the colonies. This however is still an assumption.

The degree of co-operation between the DoA, the ARC and SABIO has been excellent. Ultimately the control responsibility rests with the DoA but if progress is to be made full co-operation between these bodies as well as with all beekeepers is essential. It needs to be stressed that we all have a common goal with a common interest in preserving our industry so that it can continue to function as efficiently as possible. The resistance from Beekeepers to conform to measure to contain the disease can be anticipated, as to date South African beekeepers have been able to operate as free agents. Pest control regulations have largely been ignored as they not been able to be enforced. More regulation will become necessary if we are to live successfully with AFB.

In order that we do not re-invent the wheel it is useful to see what other countries that have lived with AFB have found necessary to control the spread of the disease. The chart below shows how different countries responded to question asked of them by Mike Allsopp. (see table 1). In almost all cases control measures include registration, inspection, destruction or limited destruction of clinically infected colonies and a monitoring of infected sites. It is some relief to find out that foundation is not seen as a serious carrier of AFB spores and the hive products are not place in total quarantine. (Bar diagram shows percentage response)

The debate as to how we should control the outbreak in the Western Cape will no doubt be heated. I feel those beekeepers who need to move bees should be checked and a barrier zone where honey may have AFB spores in it be identified so the extent of the infestation can be plotted on a map. Whatever the measures introduced the days of

casual bee management for South African beekeepers are over. Those who do manage the problem will survive –those who do not will not.”

This was followed on page 6 in the same journal by:

These measures require a degree of co-operation and certain matters will need to be arranged so that we can administer control measures.

These are my suggestions:

1. At least 10 bee inspectors be trained to visit bee sites and check on AFB so that clearance certificates can be issued as soon as possible
2. An administrative assistant be appointed to work with Mike Allsopp at the ARC to cope with the administrative details – ideally this should be a trained assessor to monitor and train inspectors. If possible this control office should be based at the ARC office in Stellenbosch and not necessarily with the SABIO.
3. Law enforcement agencies are informed immediately of requirements in place regarding bee movement.
4. A meeting with the SABIO Board members, Association Chair's, the DoA and the ARC needs to be arranged at a suitable date between the 6-10 April in the morning – all beekeepers be invited to an afternoon meeting. I suggest this be held in Stellenbosch at the ARC premises but have not yet asked them for approval for this meeting.
5. The issue of compensation for destroyed hives be discussed and a procedure worked out. (Unfortunately beekeepers' track record in this regard is not good and there is a History of abuse of compensation pay out in the past, which does not help our cause, but I sure we can work something out.)
6. The funding of this scheme would initially be by beekeepers applying for clearance certificate and SABIO but we could apply to the DoA for assistance.

I feel that if we present a united and feasible control policy to the Dept.of Agric from the industry we may persuade them that we are able to assist and monitor the control of AFB with the interests of our members being considered as well as the control of the disease. It would be sad and counter- productive if we lost the co-operation of beekeepers. The broader picture for Agriculture is that we have to have a management scheme in place before pollination of crops becomes necessary. We all need to work together to control AFB. I am sure there will be refinements and other suggestions at the proposed meeting.”

My suggestions 2, 4 and I have been implemented. The standstill never materialized at the request of beekeepers and the deciduous fruit growers as well as SANSOR as no standstill could be implemented without serious implications for agriculture as a whole.

## **2. Pollination being a priority service to fruit growers**

Pollination is now underway and a standstill would negatively impact on agriculture as a whole. Interim measures were circulated to request beekeepers to co-operate and not move infected colonies into orchards and to destroy them. This priority was at the request of those doing pollination in the Western Cape – the other provinces accepted the decision in spite of expressing concern about the movement of bulk honey and other bee products to Northern Provinces. DAFF agreed to the request for pollination services to continue so that agriculture in general did not suffer.

### **3. Interim survey to assess spread of AFB.**

The meeting in Stellenbosch submitted a request that there be a comprehensive survey before any standstill be implemented and this was accepted at a strategic planning meeting in Pretoria with SABIO and DoA/ DAFF. As result the delimiting survey was undertaken – culminating in a proposed report on the survey around the 15 August 2009. In order to enable the survey to be managed on a day-by-day basis a joint operation committee was appointed with a representative from the ARC, SABIO, and the DAFF inspectorate. An intermediate committees called Steerco was appointed to liaise between the Strategic Planning Committee and the JOC. This survey has proved to be far more difficult than first imagined. The test results are not consistent, the tests have taken longer than envisaged, there have been discrepancies in results and on the whole this has not given us the clear picture of AFB distribution that we hoped would emerge. There are more questions arising from the survey than answers and although this is not unusual for science it does make administration and regulation difficult. No singer participant in the survey has to my knowledge been obstructive in any way – it simply has not given us the answers we had hoped to have. Finger pointing and blame will not help us unravel the strange results labs are experiencing – sadly after expense and a huge effort on the part of DAFF, we remain more dependant on clinical symptoms than spore samples as reliable indicators of the spread of AFB.

### **4. Realization that AFB will have to be accepted and managed by beekeepers.**

At this stage ( Sept 2009) we still do not have a clear idea of the precise areas infected but we do need to accept that AFB has become a factor in our bee industry we have to learn to live with. This means that we will need to set up management principles and beekeepers who do not co-operate require regulations to implement compliance. These should not limit the scope of beekeeping in the country but should allow those who wish to continue to have the power to perform without being adversely affected by those who do not comply. In addition we need to accept a Biosecurity Protocol to satisfy our neighbors and the world in general that we are responsible role-players regarding notifiable diseases. Alice Baxter has provided a draft protocol for this purpose in a draft form on behalf of DAFF and distributed it for comment. The recent request to register the use of antibiotics for use by beekeepers has been agreed to by SABIO, so that if there is a serious enough impact from AFB on our bees resulting in colonies collapsing we will be able to recommend its use. This does not appear to be the case at present but if it should become necessary then permission will have been obtained for their use.

### **5. Implementation of suitable regulations to control and manage AFB.**

The beekeeping industry has legislation and regulations that control its operation. Since the discovery of AFB in South Africa SABIO has acknowledged that regulations are necessary to achieve compliance for beekeepers to act responsibly. This does need to go hand in hand with a management strategy. There has been a history of non-compliance from beekeepers in the past and regulation needs to be enforced, updated and relevant. The NAMC report recommended that all legislation be included in a beekeeping act and SABIO is working on this as a desirable long-term outcome. At present the possibility of adjusting the regulation R1674 to cover AFB is the most effective way of introducing control measures for AFB. A proposal of changes has been circulated and Steerco will be considering them in the light of the most recent survey results. These will then be sent to the Strategic Planning Committee and then either implemented or passed back to the industry for comment. The difficulty is that control regulations will always be regarded with suspicion. If motorists were left to decide on speed limits on the road how would it

work? If you drive a sports car capable of high speed and with above average brakes then a safe speed may be 120km/hr – if you are in a bus half that speed is safe. Who decides the speed? There are always different interpretations of the best regulations. My feeling is that regulations need to cover: 1) the minimum restrictions with the maximum impact; 2) be enforceable; 3) be adaptable in an ongoing manner. The ‘how to comply’ is not an issue – that is left up to the individual. In other words no traffic cop is going to ask you how you were able to travel at a speed above the limit – he will argue that you were exceeding the agreed and advertised speed and were liable to a stipulated fine for that offence. You then have the option to contest the matter in court or object in writing or pay the fine. Government has a responsibility to its citizens and neighbouring states, just as SABIO does to the beekeeping industry, to ensure that are conducting their affairs in a safe manner – especially when dealing with a notifiable disease. If any beekeeper is prepared to say he will waive any regulations and take on responsibility for the spread of AFB then let him speak out now. Our neighbours and the world could well hold the government responsible for not controlling AFB if regulations are not implemented. The Western Cape is not the whole of South Africa and we need to consider the interests of all the provinces. Regulations for levels of permissible pollution are another area, which is difficult to co-ordinate, and ultimately it is the responsibility of government to legislate for this. Industry needs to be consulted but if government decides to legislate then industry is obliged to co-operate or give good reason why the regulations are not applicable. This can only be done through a body representing that particular industry.

SABIO has arranged three public meetings with its members and other beekeepers in Stellenbosch – on the 14 May; the 17 June and the 25 July. Invitations were sent to all beekeepers and Associations to attend these meetings. The strategic planning committee has met twice on the 14 May and the 17 June. In addition Beecon focused on the problem of AFB as one of the major threats to beekeeping in South Africa and invited speakers to address problems and had a panel to discuss possible solutions. The Steerco/JOC met numerous times in Stellenbosch to arrange inspections and co-ordinate results. In addition there have been meetings arranged by associations and then a series of meetings throughout the Western and Eastern Cape presented by Dawid Smit to co-ordinate the interim management strategy. Numerous press releases, SABJ announcements, SABIO web site announcements and announcements on BeesSA have kept the debate regarding AFB alive. All participants have had opportunity to interact and comment.

The next step will be to present a final draft of Regulations once pollination is over and finality about the spread to the North of the Country is obtained.

John Moodie

SABIO Chairman

