

12. 09. 2005
Brussels,
2005D1586

Dear Dr. Lucas,

I am writing in response to your letter of 18 July concerning the UK's bee health programme.

I agree that bees play a crucial role in EU ecology and ecosystems, and hence I also consider the maintenance of bee health to be important. The Commission continues to play an active role in the development of animal health legislation to maintain and protect EU hives from disease, and is funding research on bee diseases including ongoing work on virus infections and a new project aiming to improve resistance to a variety of pests and pathogens.

Underlying animal health conditions for the trade and import of bees are laid down in Council Directive 92/65/EEC. Member States must ensure that bees are free from disease and are accompanied by an animal health certificate when presented for intra-Community trade. The legislation also makes several diseases affecting bees notifiable within the Member States. Stringent animal health conditions and certificates have also been laid down for bee imports into the EU under Commission Decision 2003/881/EC, as last amended.

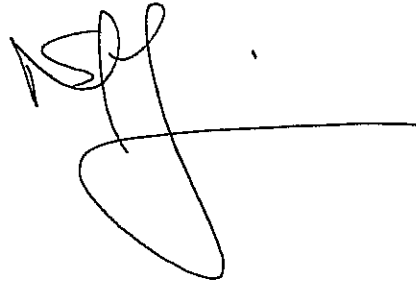
It is important that Member States maintain good animal disease surveillance and control across all animal sectors, including bees. It is therefore the responsibility of each Member State to support beekeepers and provide assistance to prevent and control bee diseases and pests, including European foulbrood. However each must decide how best to achieve this, taking into account the specific structure of the bee industry and unique challenges to control bee diseases in each Member State. The Commission also plays an important role through inspections of the competent authorities by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) to verify that adequate provisions are maintained.

Specifically in regard to European foulbrood (EFB), the presence of the disease is widespread throughout the Community, and hence it is not a notifiable disease at Community level. In the

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view of my experts, it will be very challenging, if not impossible to eradicate European foulbrood from the EU at this time, but limiting the spread of EFB through appropriate surveillance in the context of disease control, including the involvement of the competent authorities to co-ordinate programmes to identify and monitor the presence of disease can only be of benefit. I would therefore encourage beekeepers and the competent authority to continue to cooperate to ensure that the industry remains informed about the disease, and that beekeepers can continue to receive assistance to identify and eradicate EFB and other bee diseases and pests in affected hives.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'N' followed by a long horizontal line that loops back under the 'N'.