



The British Beekeepers Association

Stoneleigh Park

Warwickshire

CV2 8LG

25<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### **Statement in support of the native Irish honey bee *Apis Mellifera Mellifera***

I am contacting you on behalf of the British Beekeepers Association. We have 28,000+ members throughout the UK who have voted to try to stop imported package bees (each 1Kg package containing approximately 7000+ bees) being imported through the Irish border.

The trade of package bees allowed through the Irish border has highlighted a very serious situation and an imminent and serious risk that an exotic pest, Small Hive Beetle (SHB), could be introduced into Ireland, Once introduced it would quickly become established and become a major threat to honey bees throughout Great Britain and Ireland.

Historically, most packages of bees have come from Southern Italy. These were until the UK left the European Union largely imported directly into England and subsequently inspected by a comparatively large inspectorate and distributed around the UK by a small number of companies, which are based in England and Scotland. The Small Hive Beetle (SHB) has been endemic in Southern Italy since 2014, and although there are restrictions on the export of bees from the infested regions, those regions where the package bees are sourced are relatively close to these infested areas. The SHB can multiply to huge numbers within infested colonies, where it eats brood, honey and pollen, destroys combs and causes fermentation and spoiling of the honey. If beetle infestations are uncontrolled, they ultimately destroy the colony.

All imports are recognised by the UK government as presenting a risk to the health of bees. There are real dangers that disease and pathogens may be introduced to Irish bees and pollinators if the importation of bees through Ireland continues, especially as these imports will increase in number.

**Another vital issue is that of hybridisation.** The native bee in Ireland is in danger of becoming hybridised through the imports of different bee species. The Irish native bee *Apis Mellifera mellifera* is unique and is highly valued by Beekeepers and Beekeeping organisations in Ireland. It is recognised in Europe as being an important reservoir of the dark bee genetics making the Irish native bee a very important sub-species. Some remote or Island areas in the UK where small pockets of this species are found have been awarded special status. restricting any importation of bees. But it is a difficult situation as due to years of importation, native bees are severely hybridised, many are 'near-native' rather than native. Ireland has a duty to protect its native bee as a valuable local ecotype and a genetic pool that must be conserved for Ireland, the UK and Europe.

The BBKA would urge you to support the large majority of Irish beekeepers who have worked for many years to preserve this bee in Ireland, please consider protecting this special sub-species and ban the importation of bees into Ireland.

Because scientific research has shown that populations of pure *Apis mellifera mellifera* (*Amm*) have not been reported elsewhere in Europe in such numbers, it is now widely acknowledged that Ireland has a unique genetic resource which needs to be protected for the sake of *Amm*'s survival in Ireland as well as its place in the European (*Amm*) breeding programmes. Imported bees will endanger the survival of the pure native Irish bee.

If this opportunity to protect the Irish native bee is lost it will be a massive loss to the diversity of insects and bees not only in the UK but also in Europe. The BBKA is fully supportive of The Native Irish Honey Bee Society (NIHBS), The Irish Bee Beekeepers Association CLG (IBA), The Federation of Irish Bee Beekeepers Associations CLG (FIBKA), The Ulster Beekeepers Association (UBKA), and The Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers (INIB) an affiliated area association of the BBKA, in their efforts to protect the native dark bee, it does not make sense to allow the import of non-native bees into Ireland.

This is an opportunity to make a real difference to the survival of the Irish native honey bee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Rowberry', written in a cursive style.

Anne Rowberry

BBKA Chair