Joint Industry/MPI Manuka Honey Science Steering Group

Meeting Minutes

Date	3 October 2019
Participants	*Industry:* Tony Wright, ApiNZ Board director; Karin Kos, Chief Executive, ApiNZ; John Rawcliffe, UMFHA; *MPI:* Steve Hathaway, Chief Food Safety Scientist; Claire McDonald, Manager, Operational Research.
Location	Wellington

Chair (In rotation): Karin Kos ApiNZ

Key Discussion Points and Actions

1. **Work Programme**
    a. **Sampling project**

This New Zealand Food Safety-led project aims to provide guidance on sampling procedures that are universally adopted by industry and verifiers. MPI has undertaken a survey of current practices and expects to deliver a report of initial findings by the end of October 2019, noting that phasing will mean the survey will be extended until the end of March 2020.
Action: MPI to deliver initial report at end of October 2019

    b. **Stability study**

An agreed sampling pilot has been confirmed with FERA in the UK, along with agreed protocols. The next step is gathering data/ samples from industry and/or NZFS – priority for the samples is ratio of components, and seasonality – ideally gathered in the same season.

Action: NZFS to clarify the criteria around the samples and send to Tony Wright to check availability of Comvita samples.

    c. **Reference collection pilot trial**

NZFS advised that its contractor had gathered 107 samples from 7 regions based on previously agreed protocols. In refining the protocol for ongoing work, a number of lessons have been learned, including:

- Privacy issues and beekeeper concerns re sharing site location
- Reluctance by some beekeepers to provide one or two frames which has limited testing.
- Access problems, ie there are multiple landowners around the areas tested.
- Filtering process technique, not high tech (spatula) but sped up the filtering process. Also added centrifuge step for comb honey to get more honey through the filtering process.
- Subsampling needed to be clear - tried to have standardized weight but that didn't work (ie issue with receiving frames)
- Weight in the field and then weight at lab and storage do not always match – lesson learned if you want 20gm for testing then have 30gm

The testing included the five manuka honey markers, HMF, moisture, Brix, tutin and C4 sugars. Pollen as a country of origin testing would be useful to include.

MPI recommended continuing to use a suitably qualified contractor to gather the samples in the future. This person would need to know about beekeeping and have an auditing type skillset. It would also be useful to have botanical knowledge.

Regarding the botanical survey the contractor managed to get to 18 sites where over 850 individual plants recorded – each site is very diverse. Group discussed value of using GIS to validate the sampling.

Discussion centred on next steps for the Reference Collection and how could be established and used as credible resource for all, including for the purposes of assisting MHAS with filing, and where it ultimately sits. It was recommended that the Reference Collection is transitioned to MHAS in line with the approved PGF application, and a number of pre-conditions need to be met e.g. NZFS requirements that retain regulatory confidence so that it may be used for regulatory purposes in the future.

In terms of the Reference Collection all agreed that it was vital that it has credibility in how it transitions into a national collection, ensuring agreed protocols are in place, eg access requirements and confidentiality etc.

Action: NZFS and Industry to draft a Statement of Intent; protocols for management, use and curation; roles and responsibilities of all parties associated with the Collection including competency standards for sample collectors

2. Preliminary discussion on MHAS science stream and future role of the MHSSG

Discussion centred on the future role of MHSSG given Government has confirmed funding for a dedicated manuka honey science stream under the Provincial Growth Fund. Would there be a need to have two groups given the science work programmes are similar? There was also discussion on future Governance supporting the science streams.

Action:

NZFS/Industry agreed to ongoing discussions with views presented at the next MHSSG meeting. MHAS science contractor to meet with NZFS as part of those discussions.

That the next meeting of MHSSG be held before the end of the 2019 year.

3. International visits

NZFS verbally updated the Group on its international meetings held earlier this year. Industry had requested the official travel reports on the meetings (which cover regulatory and science issues) and these are currently being sought under the OIA by NZ Beekeeping Inc.

4. Potential science projects to explore the non-compliance of some Northland honeys

NZFS led a discussion on potential science projects in Northland to give more insight into the scale of non-conformance issue in Northland with the current government manuka honey science definition. One project proposed was an investigation into the attributes of the pink manuka flower which is dominant in Northland. The national Reference Collection is also expected to deliver more robust regional science over time.