

Sent: 20 August 2021 15:56

To: Christine Doherty

Subject: Reference No: DAFM-MMO-02008-2021

Dear Karen,

Thank you for your recent correspondence in relation to honeybee importation.

I fully acknowledge the important contribution bees make to agriculture and biodiversity as both pollinators and honey producers. In this regard, my Department provides a range of supports and initiatives to encourage and assist beekeepers and the national beekeeping associations. These supports include funding to carry out applied research through the National Apiculture Programme, grants to national beekeeping associations and grant aid to fund capital investments for beekeepers. My Department is also a partner in the All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 – 2025 and is a member of the All-Ireland Honeybee Strategy Steering Group.

My Department has funded a number of studies under the Genetic Research Grant Aid Scheme looking at various aspects of this honeybee species and specifically *apis mellifera melliferra*. In 2021, funding has been allocated for an innovative queen rearing project. My Department also supports the work of the Native Irish Honey Bee Society.

In relation to the importation of honeybees into Ireland, this is allowed under regulations governing intra-Community trade with other EU Member States. The specific health requirements for trading in bees are laid out in Regulation 2016/429. All imports of bees must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the country of export. The reason for this is to ensure that imported bees are healthy and do not harbour pathogens or parasites that may be harmful to our native bee stocks, including the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*). The health certificate also outlines the import restrictions that apply on regions that have confirmed cases of the small hive beetle.

My Department has a contingency plan in relation to diseases and pests that affect bee health. Discussions regarding animal health issues take place on an ongoing basis between my Department and their counterparts in DAERA in Northern Ireland.

Regarding the protection of the Native Irish Honey Bee, *apis mellifera mellifera*, my colleague with responsibility for Horticulture Minister of State Senator Pippa Hackett recently met with beekeeping representatives. Following this meeting officials in my Department are progressing avenues to seek clarification and feedback from the European Commission on the feasibility of the various options for protection. To this end discussions are taking place with officials in National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to outline how best this approach can be made.

In tandem, DAFM officials and beekeeping associations could investigate and progress options relating to conservation areas and education aimed at new beekeepers focused on *apis mellifera mellifera* awareness.

Yours sincerely,

Private Secretary