

AHDB Horticulture Board meeting
SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HORTICULTURE BOARD HELD AT STONELEIGH
ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2022

CONFIDENTIAL

PRESENT: Peter Judge (PJ), Michael Barker (MB), Jamie Dewhurst (JD), Roma Gwynn (RG), Robin Squance (RS), Keston Williams (KW)

APOLOGIES – Mark Eves, Rob Saunders

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ken Boyns (KB) – Divisional Director - Services

Rob Clayton (RC) - Strategy Director - Strategy

Joanna McTigue (JMc) – Crop Protection Scientist (Pesticide Regulation) (*Agenda item 4*)

Debbie Wilson (DW) – Senior Research & Knowledge Exchange Manager

Alison Thomas (AT) – Executive Assistant, minute taker

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Welcome & Apologies for absence
1.1 The Chair welcomed those in attendance. Apologies for absence had been received from Mark Eves and Rob Saunders
AGENDA ITEM 2 – Minutes of the meetings held on 5 July 2022 and 2 August 2022.
2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 5 July 2022 and 2 August 2022 were approved.
AGENDA ITEM 3 – Matters arising from the meetings held on 5 July 2022 and 2 August 2022
3.1 There were no matters arising from either meeting.
AGENDA ITEM 4 – Presentation: AHDB's EAMU & Pesticide Regulatory Service
4.1 A presentation on the current process for management of EAMUs and EAs emphasising the complexity of delivery and the key features of a centralised service was given by JMc and DW. The board were advised that the same presentation had previously been made to Jack Ward, BGA, and John Chinn of the industry working group.
4.2 During discussion following the presentation, the board recognised the difficulty and often lengthy processes involved in delivering the service, the value of it being centralised and its importance to the industry in ensuring compliance with health and safety legislation.
4.3. It was agreed that it was important that anyone considering delivering the service in future fully understood this too and opportunities to promote the presentation and signpost interested parties to the AHDB website should be taken.

4.4 A strong relationship between any future provider and CRD would be critical to the continuing success of the EAMU and EA service. The AHDB team had established this, were trusted and respected by the industry, and achieved high levels of success with c.90% of EAMU/EA applications being approved. The industry should seek to build on this.

4.5 RS commented that more could be done to promote the benefits of the service to the ornamentals sector. JMc agreed to work with RS to achieve this.

4.6 It was noted that, should a voluntary subscription-based scheme be introduced for the industry in future, subscribers must be clear about the level of service afforded to them by their subscription.

4.7 The Chair thanked JMc and DW for their presentation and commended the Hort team on their commitment and proactive and professional approach to raising awareness of their work, particularly given the circumstances and uncertainty surrounding their future.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Update on EAMUs and EAs

5.1 RC drew attention to his update paper which reported progress on the winding-down process and discussions between BGA, the industry working group and Defra.

5.2 Outstanding debt in Horticulture was now c£840k with legal action being taken against those who have refused to pay.

5.3 Work on the legacy website was continuing and the site had been developed to include information relating to the CTP scheme, SCEPTREplus programme and Strategic Centres to improve the experience for end users.

5.4 Discussions with BGA, the industry working group and Defra were ongoing, but it was apparent that, without AHDB stimulus, a replacement EAMU/EA service would not develop fast enough to protect GB Horticulture. Therefore, a proposal had been developed in accordance with Defra criteria whereby a proportion of the surplus arising from horticulture levy and reserves held by AHDB for winding up horticulture activities would be used to fund a grant for the transition of delivery of the programme from AHDB to a new industry-run organisation, with the balance being paid back to individual levy payers from 2021/22. Funding for the scheme would be contingent on the collection of outstanding levy but was forecast to be in excess of c.£1m. The board was advised that the ability to proceed with any such grant scheme would be subject to formal Defra approval.

5.5 RC explained the proposal to the board in detail and emphasised that so far and following the round table meeting led by Defra in July, only one industry-led solution had emerged. Whilst the board acknowledged this as the current position, it agreed that there was a need to consult further with the industry to gauge its support for the proposals, to confirm that there were no other interested parties and to enable AHDB to evidence that it had carried out due diligence. It was agreed that a communication would be issued to industry informing them of the proposed way forward and inviting feedback. Whether or not this should be issued by AHDB directly or by Defra would be debated outside of the meeting.

5.6 MB raised the question of TUPE and asked whether AHDB staff were content to transfer to any new organisation. The board was advised that legal advice on TUPE implications was being sought but it was emphasised that a formal consultation process had not yet begun with staff. The timelines for successful transfer of the service meant that consultation with staff would need to commence on 15 November 2022.

5.6 The board was invited to consider three potential options for the use of residual funds, as follows:

- a) Directly award all funds to pump-prime another industry-led organisation
- b) Directly award a proportion of the funds but return some of the levy directly to growers

c) Return all funds directly to growers

Following debate, and subject to the board being satisfied that the industry has been appropriately consulted and supportive of the proposed way forward, and that AHDB can evidence its due diligence, the board confirmed it was unanimously in favour of option a) in order to maximise the funding available to support the ongoing delivery of the EAMU/EA service and ruling out the direct repatriation of funds to levy payers. They requested that this recommendation be made to the AHDB board at its meeting in September.

5.7 The board was advised that royalties from breeding clubs currently realised an annual income of c.£140k which would diminish over time. The board was asked to consider four options for the management of this income in future including the transfer of income to BGA to offset running costs, or elsewhere eg Defra. The Chair declared an interest in this matter and did not participate in the debate or the vote.

5.9 Following debate, the board (except for the Chair who abstained) voted unanimously in favour of recommending that the income be transferred to individual grower associations to spend against new projects for the species in question provided they could be fairly identified. To-date no work had been undertaken to determine how this would work in practice, but the Executive would explore this further and report back to the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – Any other business

None

AGENDA ITEM 7 – Date of next meeting

9.00am, Tuesday 1 November 2022 at AHDB, Stoneleigh Park.