

OFFICIAL

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity  
Ministear an Àiteachais agus Ceangal  
Jim Fairlie MSP  
Jim Fairlie BPA



T: 0300 244 4000  
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

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Dear Beekeeper,

### **SCOTLAND WIDE SURVEY 2024**

The Scottish Government takes honey bee health extremely seriously. In 2022 we launched our second 10-year Honey Bee Health Strategy setting out our aims to improve honey bee health in Scotland. This Strategy is supported by an Implementation Plan which sets out the specific objectives and activities we will undertake to deliver the aims in our Strategy.

One of the actions identified in the Implementation Plan is a review of the current European foulbrood (EFB) control strategy in Scotland. This notifiable disease of honey bees is extremely detrimental to the health of the colony and can be highly infectious to neighbouring apiaries.

While Scottish Government Honey Bee Health inspectors undertake an annual programme of inspections to identify and manage this and other notifiable diseases, we are conscious that we do not have a wholly accurate picture of how widely spread EFB is in Scotland.

The high number of outbreaks, number of beekeepers, and short inspection season, means that despite the investment from SG to increase the number of bee inspectors, deployment of our inspectors to the currently believed disease free areas in Scotland would reduce our ability to tackle the on-going outbreaks of disease. It has been therefore decided in agreement with the BHIP that the Honey Bee Health Team will be conducting a nation-wide survey this year to establish the distribution of EFB across the country.

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Beekeepers registered on the national database, BeeBase, will be randomly selected and invited to send samples of adult bees so they can be tested for the pathogen which causes EFB. You can register on BeeBase at any time, it is free and your details will remain confidential and only visible to the Scottish Government Honey Bee Health Team and the NBU. Not only will you be eligible to participate in this survey, your registration means you will be kept updated on any alerts and developments relating to honey bee health near you.

Selected beekeepers will be sent a pack which will contain instructions and everything necessary to provide samples. Participants will receive test results, once they are available in winter 2024/2025 and, if necessary, notification on next steps. A full report on the results of the survey will be published at the end of the process and participants' personal details will, of course, be kept confidential.

During the survey, the bees are screened for the pathogen. If it is found, this is NOT confirmation of notifiable disease at this point. A bee inspector would be deployed to inspect for clinical signs of disease and standard inspection protocol would proceed from there. If EFB is found at inspection, normal disease protocols take place. If no disease is present the beekeeper would be given practical advice to help reduce the chance of the affected apiary developing disease.

In the meantime, I am pleased to announce that we are publishing our EFB heatmap which shows our current understanding of the distribution of the disease in Scotland. This is to help you identify areas where particular care should be taken when moving bees into or out of the most affected areas. You can also find the heatmap on BeeBase's Scottish honey bee health pages.

Honey bees are vital pollinators for our crops and environment, and beekeeping is an important driver for the Scottish economy. As beekeepers your role in ensuring we achieve a healthy and sustainable population of honey bees in Scotland is vital.

I strongly encourage beekeepers invited to take part in this survey to participate. Your contribution will provide valuable data which will help shape the future EFB control strategy in Scotland.

Meantime, our Honey Bee Health inspectors will continue to inspect apiaries for EFB and other notifiable diseases throughout the summer as per our established disease control programme and as always, if you suspect you have EFB or AFB in your hives, you **must** contact the Bee Health Team to report this immediately.

If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact the Honey Bee Health Team at: [Bees\\_Mailbox@gov.scot](mailto:Bees_Mailbox@gov.scot)

Yours sincerely,



**JIM FAIRLIE**