

**NEW MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF BEES**

Communication from the European Communities

The following communication, dated 28 January 2004, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of the European Communities.

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1. The European Commission adopted recently a legal text stepping up measures to protect the EC bee population from two exotic parasites. The original proposal was notified to WTO trade partners in document G/SPS/N/EEC/208 (25 July 2003) and it was modified later - to take into account of their comments - on a new text notified in document G/SPS/N/EEC/208/Add.1 (27 October 2003).

**Background**

2. Bees are imported into the European Communities to extend breeding stocks and to improve the productivity of the apiculture industry, but at the moment bees can enter the European Communities in large consignments that are very difficult to examine rigorously for the presence of parasites.

3. The small hive beetle *Aethina tumida* and the parasitic mite *Tropilaelaps* are not international notifiable diseases of the bee according to the Terrestrial Animal Health Code of the International Animal Health Organization (OIE). Both parasites have never been reported in the European Communities.

4. If introduced from third countries, the small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps* could severely endanger bee health, the apiculture industry and honey production. In effect, the small hive beetle can multiply rapidly in infested colonies where it eats brood stock, destroys combs and, if unchecked, ultimately destroys the colony; the *Tropilaelaps* mite has also been shown to cause high mortality in affected bee colonies. The mites have also been linked to bees suffering leg and wing deformities. These pests can hence disrupt pollination so they also pose a risk to the sustainability of the apiculture industry as well as agriculture and the environment in the European Communities. It is also well documented that these two parasites have had a devastating effect on the health of honey bees, the bee industry and the production of honey in affected third countries so the European Commission proposed these simple import rules to make sure these bee parasites do not hitch a ride to Europe. It has also been shown that their infestivity (and infestation rate) cause the diseases to spread very easily so checks at destination are recommended as an additional safeguard.

5. In view of the above, and as an internal measure affecting intra-community trade only, the European Commission added these two parasites to the list of notifiable diseases within in the

European Communities<sup>1</sup> making it compulsory for all beekeepers within the European Communities who suspect their colonies are infested, to inform the appropriate authorities in their member States who, in turn, should inform the European Commission and other EC member States.

6. Further to this, and in view of the risks posed by these pests, EC member States deemed necessary to adopt additional measures to prevent the parasites entering and spreading through the European Communities, therefore the Commission proposed to the EC member States a new harmonized Community rule for the imports of both live honey bees and bumble bees from third countries and to verify the absence of these parasites for bee imports. The Commission's proposal was agreed with the EC member States through the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health on 4-5 November 2003.

### Legal reference

7. *Commission Decision 2003/881/EC of 11 December 2003 concerning the animal health and certification conditions for imports of bees (Apis mellifera and Bombus spp.) from certain third countries and repealing Decision 2000/462/EC (Official Journal of the EC, L328, Volume 46, 17 December 2003 pages 26-31).* The full text can be downloaded from the address indicated below:

English: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/l\\_328/l\\_32820031217en00260031.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/l_328/l_32820031217en00260031.pdf)

French: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/fr/oj/dat/2003/l\\_328/l\\_32820031217fr00260031.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/fr/oj/dat/2003/l_328/l_32820031217fr00260031.pdf)

Spanish: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/es/oj/dat/2003/l\\_328/l\\_32820031217es00260031.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/es/oj/dat/2003/l_328/l_32820031217es00260031.pdf)

### What changes can be expected?

8. Under the new Decision, imports of bees will be limited to consignments containing a single queen bee with a maximum of 20 accompanying attendants. Imports will only be authorized from third countries that have demonstrated the necessary veterinary competence to certify that animals fulfil all criteria for import into the European Communities and where the small hive beetle and the *Tropilaelaps* mite are notifiable diseases.

9. When the consignment arrives in the European Communities, the cages, attendants, and any other material accompanying queens from the third country of origin must also be sent to a laboratory where they will all be examined for the presence of the small hive beetle, their eggs or larvae and signs of the *Tropilaelaps* mite.

10. Small colonies of bumble bees up to a maximum of 200 adults can still be authorized for import into the European Communities if they have been bred and reared solely under environmentally controlled conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Regulation (EC) No 1398/2003 of 5 August 2003 amending Annex A to Council Directive 92/65/EEC to include the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*), the *Tropilaelaps* mite (*Tropilaelaps* spp.), Ebola and monkey pox (Official Journal L 198, 6/8/2003 pp. 3-6).