

THE ESSEX BEEKEEPER



'Reclaiming Stolen Honey' photo Paul Abbott

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Essex Beekeeper's Association

The Essex Beekeepers' Association is a registered charity whose object is to further the craft of beekeeping in Essex.

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The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the EBKA.

February 2013 and March 2013

- 1 Feb. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL. Open forum chaired by Jim McNeill.
- 7 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm Harlow* at Kings Church Red Willow. Spring management.
- 16 Feb. *Saturday 7.30pm Braintree* Constitutional Club CM7 1TY. Annual Dinner.
- 18 Feb. *Monday 7.30pm Chelmsford* at the Link Hall, Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford CM1 2XB. The speaker will be Jane Ridler on an Overview of Exam Modules. Followed by a brief introduction to work in Uganda.
- 19 Feb. *Tuesday 8.00pm Saffron Walden* at Thaxted Guildhall CM6 2LA, 'Beekeeping in Tropical Africa' Talk by Richard & Jane Ridler.
- 21 Feb. *Thursday 8.00pm Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall Larkshall Rd, London E4 6NH. Film night.
- 27 Feb. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Kathryn Lwin from 'River of Flowers' will be explaining how they have planted urban meadows connected by 'pollination streams' within London and advising us on the feasibility of setting up such a scheme within the Southend area. www.riverofflowers.org.
- 28 Feb. *Thursday 7.30pm Colchester* at Langham Community Centre. 'Getting ready for the season' forum.
- 1 Mar. *Friday 8.00pm Romford* Chadwick Hall, Main Road, Gidea Park RM2 5EL. Swarm Control with Pat Allen.
- 2 Mar. *Saturday 2.00pm EBKA AGM* at Room E06 of Writtle College, Lordship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RP (opp Garden Centre). See page 13 of this issue for Agenda.
- 16 Mar. *Friday 7.30pm Braintree* Constitutional Club CM7 1TY. A talk given by John Barlow on Preparation for the year and Swarm Control.
- 19 Mar. *Tuesday 8.00pm Saffron Walden* at Thaxted Guildhall CM6 2LA, 'Dealing with Rape Honey' Talk by Richard Alabone.
- 21 Mar. *Thursday 8.00pm Epping Forest* at Chingford Horticultural Hall Larkshall Rd, London E4 6NH. Swarm Control.
- 27 Mar. *Wednesday 7.30pm Southend* at Women's Institute Hall, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. 'Swarms - Avoidance and Collection'.

CEC Beekeeping Skills Workshops in 2013/14 Jane Ridler (Exam Secretary)

Over the last five years or so – since the blossoming of all things bee in the UK media, all Essex Divisions have put in enormous effort into teaching and supporting the large numbers of new beekeepers. You may well be part of your Division's programme for 'Introduction to Beekeeping'.

The CEC feels that support and training should be given to our more advanced beekeepers at County level so that expertise is developed in Essex. To this end the CEC has decided to subsidise some courses in 2013/14 - partly funded by EBKA and partly by the delegate. There will be an 8 week Queen Rearing Course run by Clive Debruyne during May, June and July (evenings) and a 2 day weekend Microscopy Course run by Graham Royle in October in 2013. In 2014 we also plan to run a course for preparing for the BBKA General Husbandry Certificate. The courses, whilst obviously valuable in themselves to the individuals taking part, are also to promote excellence in beekeeping skills in Essex and through them we will be able to educate our current novices on to higher levels. Hence the CEC part funding of the enterprise.

By the nature of the courses there will only be 12/14 places available on each. It is therefore important that the people who attend will be prepared to give back to their Divisions. They will also have at least moderate beekeeping experience – holding the BBKA Basic Assessment is a must and not being a total beginner in the subject of the course. In addition, delegates need to be active in their Division, attending meetings regularly, and making active contributions in the Division e.g. support in beginners courses, Honey Show etc and, most importantly, be prepared to 'cascade' skills to others.

The Divisional committees will nominate delegates for the Workshops. We will do our best to spread the delegates fairly between the Divisions and include as many individuals as possible (I would think at this stage that people would be unlikely to attend more than 1 but that depends on popularity!) The objective is that after the completion of the courses, sometime in the future, the delegates will make contributions to the education of Essex beekeepers.

EBKA Annual General Meeting Saturday 2nd March 2013

Venue: Room E06, Lordship Road, Writtle, CM1 3RP

Yes, it seems ages away, but please put this date into your diary now!

The AGM itself, starting at 2pm, will not take very long, and then there will be a refreshment break, laid on by Epping Forest Division. After the break, there will be a speaker, **Graham Royle**, to give us a talk about the *Honeybee under the Microscope*.

Graham is an excellent speaker and his photographs are amazing. Let's make sure there is a large turnout for this event. It will be an enjoyable social occasion as well as a great opportunity to meet members from other parts of Essex. Bring your partners and children – they will love the pictures too. Everyone is welcome.

Claims for manuka honey activity By Professor Peter Molan, University of Waikato

This article originally appeared in the New Zealand Beekeeper 2012. Professor Peter Molan and the Editor of the New Zealand Beekeeper have both given their permission for it to be published in this magazine. The article was first published in The New Zealand BeeKeeper, October 2012, pages 23-25.

I have been asked to write this article for the benefit of the many new producers of manuka honey who have come into the industry.

However, I think it will be of benefit also for those who have been involved for a long time but may have never fully understood, or have been misled by much of the debate that has gone on in the past, about rating the antibacterial activity of manuka honey.

Whilst standards have been established to define whether or not a honey can be called manuka, little progress has been made with establishing a standard for describing the antibacterial activity of manuka honey. It is very much a case of *caveat emptor* ('let the buyer beware') in the marketplace.

Laws and regulations

In New Zealand and in other countries there are laws that protect consumers from being misled, and laws to protect traders from unfair competition.

Anyone making a claim for honey having a particular level of antibacterial activity when selling it needs to take care that they are not falling foul of these laws. This article has been written to ensure that false claims are not made unknowingly (which is not an excuse for offenders).

In some instances there are regulations or international agreements that give a tolerance for items being sold to fall by a specified margin below the level claimed. With there being no standards or agreements for the activity of manuka honey, any claims made have to be absolutely true. For this reason sellers need to allow for any margin of error in measuring the activity. This is like the 'baker's dozen' of years gone by: an extra loaf thrown in when selling a dozen in order to avoid the possibility of being penalised for selling short weight. Honey producers use the term 'over-packing' to describe this. It needs to be done for antibacterial activity just as much as it does for the weight of honey put in jars.

Producers can easily check how accurate their packing equipment is regarding the weight of honey put in jars, and thus to know by how much they need to 'over-pack' to allow for the margin of error. But it is not so easy to know the necessary allowance for the margin of error in the level of antibacterial activity. Two

different factors need to be taken into account: (1) the sampling error that can result from honey being viscous and varying in composition throughout a bulk quantity, and (2) the margin of error in the measurements made by the testing laboratory.

The test report from the laboratory gives the activity of the sample of honey supplied. This will only be the activity of the batch of honey if every unit of that batch is identical. Stephens and Molan (2003) explained the reasons why a sample taken from bulk honey is often not representative of the whole quantity of honey. There is a good chance that the level of activity that is in the packed jars may be lower than the result from testing of a sample from bulk honey. If there is not good stirring of a batch, it is also likely that individual jars in a batch may have a level of activity lower than that claimed on the label if there is variation of activity throughout a bulk quantity of honey, or if blending has been done. Variation between jars can also occur if the filling machine is not flushed clear of any previously packed honey of lower activity.

The only reliable way of ensuring that the claim on the label is correct is to have testing done on jars of the finished product, with the processing done in a way that prevents variation within a batch of jars. But allowance still needs to be made for the margin of error in the testing.

All laboratory assays have a margin of error, whether they are biological assays or chemical assays. International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ) requires testing laboratories to make this margin of error known to clients on request for any testing method that IANZ accredits. Sellers of honey need to 'over-pack' by this margin to ensure that they do not make a false claim when a result reported is at the high end of the range of variation from the true value.

Activity claims and industry implications

Claims that are made regarding the level of antibacterial activity in manuka honey are usually done in one of two ways: (1) either the level of antibacterial activity is expressed as being equivalent to the concentration of a solution of a standard antiseptic, phenol, that has the same level of antibacterial activity; or (2) as the level of methylglyoxal, the antibacterial component of manuka honey.

The correlation between the level of methylglyoxal and the antibacterial activity of the honey is rough. Some sellers have the level of methylglyoxal measured, but instead of stating the level of methylglyoxal they state the level of antibacterial activity (as equivalent % phenol) estimated from the correlation. Where an IANZ-accredited laboratory is giving a result for the antibacterial activity that has been obtained by estimation in that way, then the margin of error will be available on request. This will permit sellers to 'over-pack' by a sufficient amount to make allowance for the margin of error in the estimation of activity. Regardless of how accurately the level of methylglyoxal has been measured, if it is antibacterial activity rather than the level of methylglyoxal that is being claimed, then that has to be a true claim.

Hill Laboratories uses its own correlation data to estimate the antibacterial activ-

ity from the level of methylglyoxal they measure. This is proprietary information that has not been published. Estimating the level of antibacterial activity using published correlation data is a problem because there are big differences between different publications. Initially the three different sets of published data (two from Adams et al., 2008, by different methods of measurement; and one from Atrott & Henle, 2009) were in close agreement. Then Adams et al. (2009) published that they had made an error in one of the two methods of measurement, and increased their results for one of their two sets of data by 87%, bringing them well out of agreement with their other set of data and that of Atrott & Henle (2009). Another thing to take into consideration is that different laboratories get different results when they estimate the level of methylglyoxal in the same sample of honey.

Major problems may arise if claimed antibacterial activity is estimated rather than directly measured—the honey may be only partially inhibiting the growth of bacteria (i.e., only slowing, not stopping, the growth of bacteria). It has been widely experienced in the honey industry in the past that honey with an activity level of 10% phenol very frequently gives partial inhibition. If the antibacterial activity is estimated rather than directly measured, then it will not be known if it gives partial inhibition. The claim made is that the honey has the same antibacterial activity as 10% phenol, but it is not known if that is a true claim for honeys giving partial inhibition.

Some sellers of honey do not define what the numbers mean in the rating of activity of their products. This may not be allowed under consumer laws in some countries. But even if it does not infringe consumer laws, it still leaves the seller open to being sued for damages from competitors because of unfair competition. It would be a similar situation to a company putting '250' on a jar of honey that looked like a 250-gram jar when they were using their own unit of weight that was 0.9 gram and the jar actually contained 225 grams of honey. Regulations specify the precise meaning of the numbers '91' and '95' for the octane rating for petrol. No defined standard exists for manuka honey activity.

It is not generally understood that the commonly used unit of activity, the equivalent % phenol, depends on the testing conditions. Unless the unit used is qualified by stating the testing method being specified, then the claim is absolute and the honey would have to be at least as active as a 10% solution of phenol under any testing conditions; otherwise it would be a false claim. Quite large differences in activity can be expected if the testing is done differently.

What has become virtually an industry standard internationally is to have the unit of activity stated to be the equivalent % phenol with the honey tested by the method published by Allen, Molan & Reid (1991). It should be noted that honey giving partial inhibition would not meet this definition of activity units, nor would honey with a rating of activity of less than 8. In order to be able to measure such low levels of activity (including in the testing done to obtain the correlation between methylglyoxal and antibacterial activity), the honey has to be tested as a 50% solution instead of a 25% solution. This gives a different numerical value to the activity measurement obtained. Although a correction factor is applied, this is

approximate. Research at the University of Waikato has shown that there are substantial differences in the factor between batches of honey.

The published testing method (Allen, Molan, & Reid, 1991) describes testing for both types of antibacterial activity in honey—that due to hydrogen peroxide, and the non-peroxide activity (NPA) that occurs only in honey from manuka and other *Leptospermum* species. It was to distinguish the honey with NPA from other honey that the term ‘active manuka honey’ was coined. This term came from it being noted in the paper by Allen et al. (1991) about NPA that, “the present survey has shown not all samples said to be manuka honey can be relied upon to provide this antibacterial activity.” In subsequent publications, and in a large number of news media reports, the term ‘active manuka honey’ was used to distinguish manuka honey with NPA from manuka honey on sale that did not have NPA. In view of that, it would be quite reasonable for a competitor to claim unfair competition if someone were selling as ‘active manuka honey’ a product in which the activity was not NPA, or rating antibacterial activity without making it clear that the activity shown is hydrogen peroxide activity and not NPA.

The dictionary definition of ‘deceive’ is, “To cause to believe what is not true; mislead.” To make the claim of activity unambiguous, it should be stated which type of activity is being shown, as well as showing the units and method of measurement. The component giving manuka honey its NPA has been identified as methylglyoxal, so a claim that honey being sold contains a substantial level of methylglyoxal unambiguously shows that it is ‘active manuka honey’ as originally defined.

Some beekeepers in other countries are resentful that imported manuka honey is selling at much higher prices than their own honey gets. Although direct restriction on imports is against the principles of free trade, there are other ways of imposing trade barriers. New Zealand exporters are already having shipments held up for testing as a result of excessive levels of sucrose having been found in some manuka honey. Complaints about false claims of activity levels could also lead to similar trade barriers. Not telling the truth about the level of activity could cause financial loss to many more parties than just the offending company.

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Essex Beekeepers Pollination Scheme Geoff Mills

This Scheme has been running for many years since a triumvirate of EBKA, Writtle College and the National Farmers' Union set it up.

Its purpose is (a) to put EBKA members in touch with growers who require hives of honeybees to pollinate their crops and (b) to put Essex growers in touch with EBKA members who can supply hives. The Scheme is not organised by EBKA (see below).

The Scheme invites growers to order hives by the beginning of March. The Scheme has supplied up to 30 hives to a single grower although 2 to 10 is a more normal quantity. If a beekeeper does not have sufficient hives to supply the customer then we suggest that two or more beekeepers get together to supply the order. Transport to the grower is supplied by the beekeeper and when on site the grower may be asked to help using a tractor when ground conditions are difficult. A fee is charged to the grower for each hive supplied and this fee is increased pro rata for periods longer than four weeks. Beekeepers must be members of EBKA. The fee is sufficient to help with the cost of feeding your bees.

A small committee of EBKA volunteers runs the not-for-profit Scheme. The Scheme gives guarantees to both grower and beekeepers and details may be obtained from the Scheme Organiser (G.L.Mills, Tanglewood, The Ridge, Lt.Baddow CM3 4RX). Contact me by phone, the website page or email, details of which are on the website. As organiser I am able to help with details of how hives are prepared for pollination and how they can be transported. Some hives may be typically required for greenhouses/tunnels and others for top fruit and OSR.



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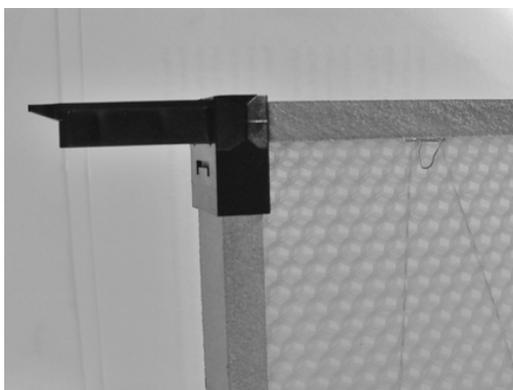
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Frames for the Future? Richard Alabone

Beesy frames, which have plastic corner pieces and lugs, were first introduced about 15 years ago but their manufacture has had problems. Firstly, it proved to be very difficult to obtain decent quality wood so a change was made to plywood which proved to be a mistake. Initially the plywood was of good quality, but recently the thickness varies enormously and much of it is anything but flat. On the positive side all the parts of a frame snap together requiring no nails or hammers and all the difficult machining, required for normal frames, is part of the moulded plastic.

So why are these claimed to be Frames for the future? The answer is that they are now manufactured using MDF (medium density fibre-board) which is compressed fibre, much like hardboard, and its flat and stable. The main advantage is that this material is so much cheaper than wood; the cost of MDF for one frame is only 11 pence, being a fraction of the price



of wood. Although MDF is not as strong as wood it has proved to be perfectly satisfactory in use for both brood and super frames. It is straight and stable and gives you no splinters.

By having moulded plastic corners and lugs the disadvantages in the 100 year old design of wooden frames have been overcome. Firstly, the length of propolis holding each frame in place has been reduced from 23 inches to six points of contact, often making the use of a hive tool unnecessary, and the lugs are tapered making frame removal much easier. Additionally the bottom corners have spacers which are an advantage with brood frames. Whereas, wooden frames have evolved to have a wedge holding the foundation at the top by nails, these frames have no wedge to hold wired foundation; just a staple over each wire loop holds it in place.

Assembly couldn't be easier. Snap all the parts together, including both bottom bars which are spaced a little wider than usual to allow the foundation to pass between them. Then bend over the wire loops, fit the foundation into the top bar groove and staple over the loops. Bending the loop back over the staple avoids any possibility of it slipping out.

Of course things sometimes have a habit of being difficult. Foundation is often oversize, not even fitting frames from the same manufacturer! Also MDF expands by up to 10% if stored in a damp place making assembly difficult, but if necessary 20 minutes in the oven, gas mark 2, will dry it out. Then there is the

nasty fact that MDF is bonded by a formaldehyde resin which emits the carcinogenic gas formaldehyde, about which there is much pompous panic. But if you look on the Health and Safety Executive website hse.gov.uk it says "levels of free formaldehyde.... are thought to be insignificant", that is from European E1 boards: Chinese E2- MDF is a lot worse. If you are still dubious you'll get a shock if you Google formaldehyde in toothpaste, or beer: in toothpaste it whitens your teeth and is put into your beer to clarify it. So how about having your honey clarified ?!

Quite a few brave souls have made their own frames, buying just the plastic parts making use of pallets or other old wood. While this may be a satisfying job if you have the skill and tools, it is very time consuming. It's much better to start off with 9mm MDF and cut it into 1" strips. Mr. Beesy uses three saws mounted on one spindle to cut these strips to length while the two outer saws accurately cut the snap grooves. It's all pretty simple that way and cheap at 11p for the MDF and 30p for a set of 4 plastic corners.

When it comes to deep brood frames there are various problems with the standard design. Prewired foundation tends to come adrift as the bees nibble wax away from the bottom. Also the wax, which is supposed to be 100% beeswax, often softens and sags in warm weather. MDF frames come with a separate strip to be stapled vertically in the centre of the foundation on one side. This has the effect of reducing the tendency of the comb to sag and bulge or come away at the bottom. It's definitely a good idea on anything deeper than a National frame.

All frames are 1 3/8" spaced and are compatible with the standard Hoffman wooden frames. When it comes to super frames the 1 inch wide top and bottom bars are a considerable improvement over normal shallow frames giving more honey per frame, simplifying uncapping as well as reducing brace comb between supers.

All in all, these frames have many advantages over the 100 year old designs. The fact that they are MDF and plastic makes the parts much easier to make as well as being so much easier to assemble. But the difference in the long run will be the differences in the price of wood and MDF.

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Beekeeping Tips No. 23
Drone Layers
By Pollinator

Drones are produced by laying workers, mature queens and failing queens. They are hatched from unfertilised eggs and emerge from the cell some 24 days after they were laid.

At this time of year (March) and at the first inspection of colonies the brood must be checked carefully in order to know that the queen is laying plenty of worker brood in a good even pattern. That is to say, without random empty cells in the areas of sealed brood. If random empty cells exist within an area of sealed worker brood it is known as a pepperbox pattern. It indicates that the queen is running short of sperm with which to fertilise each egg (fertilised eggs hatch as workers). I suspect that we shall see more than the usual number of failing queens in the Spring of 2013 because the Summer of 2012 has been so wet with a more than normal rainfall in most parts of the UK.

If you have drawn-out brood frames that have more than 20% of drone brood then it is time to remove some and replace with drawn empty frames, or if you don't have any, then a frame of foundation, on one side of the brood nest, will do so long as it leaves room for the queen to expand her brood nest. I add just one such frame of foundation at a time. If there are insufficient stores then a frame feeder, filled with syrup, adjacent to it will encourage the bees to rapidly draw it out. This frame can be one of the two or three that should be replaced each year, as it helps hive hygiene and gives maximum cell size (cell volume decreases each time a cocoon is left). Small cell size can lead to smaller bees hatching.

Should you have been unfortunate enough to have lost a queen than you may be left with drone laying workers, in which event, they are best thrown out on to the ground and the frames of drone brood comb melted down in you solar extractor. Eggs laid by workers are often on the sides of the cell and not on the bottom, as the laying workers cannot reach the cell bottom. Good drawn worker frames can be sterilised with acetic acid fumes in an enclosed brood box.

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ESSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

133rd Annual General Meeting to be held
on Saturday 2nd March 2013
starting at 2pm

at Room E06 of Writtle College, Lowlship Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3RP (opp Garden Centre)

A G E N D A

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the 132nd AGM & Minutes of the EGM on 29/11/12
- 3 Report from the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee
- 4 General Treasurer's Report & Approval of the 2012 Accounts
- 5 Reports from other members of the Central Executive Committee
- 6 Election of President
- 7 Election of County Officers (Trustees)
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
- 8 Notification of the 2013 Divisional Voting Members
and 2014 Presiding Officer
- 9 Election of County (non-Trustee) Appointees
BBKA Delegate
Editor (*The Essex Beekeeper*)
Examinations Secretary
NHS Delegate
EBKA Show Secretary
Spray & Disease Committee Delegate
- 10 Confirmation of Accounts Examiner

- 11 2012 Conference Report: Chairman of Harlow Division
- 12 2013 Conference Preview: Chairman of Epping Forest Division
- 13 Installation of 2013 Presiding Officer
& Reading from the Book of Commemoration

Following the AGM:

Refreshments, kindly provided by Epping Forest Division.

Talk by **Graham Royle**
The Honeybee under the Microscope

Attention Beekeepers

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**ESSEX BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING
held on Thursday 29th November 2012**

Trinity Methodist Halls, Chelmsford

These minutes will be considered correct if no objection is raised in writing before Thursday 28th February 2013. Any point challenged will be brought before the next meeting for correction of the record.

Presiding Officer: David Tyler (Harlow Chairman)
Also present: Pat Allen (General Secretary), Mike Barke (Harlow DVM), Lee Bartrip (Colchester DVM), Roy Carter (DH&Maldon DVM), Chad Colby-Blake (Southend member), Eric Fenner (President), Pádraig Floyd (Romford DVM), James Jolley (Braintree DVM), Penny Learmonth (Saffron Walden DVM), Bob Manning (Acting General Treasurer), Eileen Marrable (Romford), Jim McNeill (Spray & Disease), Ian Nichols (Epping Forest DVM), Richard Ridler (CEC Chairman), Jean Smye (Chelmsford DVM), Terry Watson (NHS Delegate).
Apologies: Howard Gilbert, Jeremy Huband (Southend DVM), Jane Ridler.

The business of the meeting was to approve two propositions affecting the Rules:

1 Associate Category

The CEC proposes that Associates become known as 'Divisional Associates'. They will not have voting rights and cannot become EBKA Trustees, but the subscriptions they pay and benefits they get should be set by Divisions. The changes to take effect from the end of this meeting.

There was some discussion and clarification. Chad Colby-Blake queried the timing of changes to subscriptions. It was explained that divisions, if they wish, can set the subscription at their AGMs in January 2013 to take effect on 1st January 2014.

Proposed Richard Ridler, seconded Pat Allen, passed *nem con*.

2 Tenure in posts

The CEC believes that limiting the length of tenure in the Association's main posts is a good thing, but flexibility is needed for the non-Trustee posts if the Association is to be able to maintain a full CEC. The CEC proposes the following, to take effect from the end of this meeting:

- *Trustees should be limited to **four** years (CEC Chair, General Secretary, General Treasurer, DVMs)*
- *County non-Trustee appointees – i.e. those elected by the membership at an EBKA General Meeting – should have a limit of **five** years (President, BBKA Delegate, NHS Delegates, Editor, Examination Secretary, Spray & Diseases Secretary, EBKA Show Secretary)*
- *Minutes Secretary, Membership Secretary, Book of Commemoration Secretary, Advertising Secretary, Distribution Secretary, should be appointed by the CEC.*

Chad Colby-Blake queried Rule 9 which states that postholders stand down annually; it was explained that Rule 9 stands and the proposition sets **limits** to tenure. Roy Carter asked if a DVM can become a DVM for a different division consecutively; it was thought yes, as each DVM is a separate post.

Proposed Jean Smye, seconded Terry Watson, passed *nem con*.

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