

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL HONEY COMMISSION.

Sliema (Malta). 7 May 2019.

by Teresa Sancho

The general assembly was chaired by Dr. Gudrun Beckh and started at 18.05 hours. The president of the International Honey Commission welcomed every attendant and asked the chairs of the workshops to give a short presentation about their corresponding sessions.

RESIDUES GROUP: Patricia Beaune first summarized the contributions, talking about a brainstorming on pesticides and authenticity of beeswax, and concluding that the group did not come to a decision about establishing a specific group for beeswax. Next, she talked about veterinary drugs residues in honey, focusing on the complexity of doing interlaboratory trials on molecules that are difficult to analyse. Residues of treatments against varroa and various repellents were also discussed. Finally, for all members of the group, Patricia Beaune highlighted the importance of keeping in touch to share information about the main contaminant molecules, as well as methods.

POLLEN GROUP: Maria Campos talked about the discussion of the group about last publications on pesticides and nitrofurans. She also indicated that this year there had been three meetings before the encounter in Malta. Eventually, Maria Campos expressed her desire to give up the leadership of the group after fifteen years, reporting that Ofelia Anjos will be the new leader of the pollen group. Gudrun Beckh welcomed Ofelia, who introduced herself and told that was open to research collaborations.

MELISSOPALINOLOGY GROUP: Maria Dimou began her talk by summarising the presentations of the workshop and conclusions drawn by them. Among the topics presented in the workshop were the DNA metabarcoding and its interpretation in the determination of botanical composition of honey, the presence of starch grains and other atypical particles found in honey and its significance in honey adulteration, the use of microsphere markers for pollen quantitative analysis, the results of the ring tests on honey pollen analysis that took place during the last years among the members of the group and the list of under-represented, over-represented and nectarless pollen taxa of European honeys. She underlined the need for harmonisation among the laboratories regarding the quantitative analysis and the characterisation of under-represented, over-represented and nectarless pollen taxa, and she ended by emphasising the need of continuing this discussion.

AUTHENTICITY GROUP: Lutz Eiflein talked about the importance of holding comprehensive meetings within the authenticity WG, as well as the organization and tasks of the authenticity group. As the field of authenticity is of high interest to all IHC members and intensive work

needs to be done for the international harmonization and standardization of honey and bee products authenticity (beeswax, royal jelly, propolis, pollen) it was proposed to form sub-groups on specific topics and bee products, respectively. It was agreed that such topics as origin and adulteration of bee products should be discussed in further IHC authenticity workshops. After a short discussion on the very different authentication and analytical procedures for each beehive product, a new group on beeswax authentication was created. This group is going to be chaired by Lidija Svecnjak. Lutz Elflein encouraged collaborative studies about beeswax authentication by GC/MS, FT-IR and NMR. Moving on to authenticity of bee products in general terms, the role of authorities regarding physico-chemical, and sensory analyses was reviewed, highlighting the fact that more advanced methods as NMR and isotopic analyses for honey authentication were only used in few countries. In this respect, honey authenticity is subject to scientific and administrative activities at various levels, among them, in new working groups for bee products at European (CEN) and ISO levels, the former taking into account all testing studies carried out in the Joint Research Centre of Geel (Belgium) in the frame of the coordinated control program on honey including ^{13}C EA/LC-IRMS, LC-HRMS and NMR Profiling. As to the ISO level, a working group for honey regarding specific analytical techniques is likely to be created in the next ISO meeting that will be held in June in Paris. The next point was about Manuka honey and the constant search for identification markers and improved assessment criteria. The two attendants from New Zealand, Young Mee Yoon and Steve Hathaway (MPI) suggested starting a new round of analyses, because there are honeys labelled as Manuka, which are actually mixtures of Manuka and other honeys, not complying some of this mixtures with the New Zealand regulation for Manuka honey. They encouraged collaborative studies with a representative sampling. IHC offered collaboration to promote international harmonization of scientifically based standards for Manuka honey. International Honey Commission could create a descriptive sheet of unifloral Manuka honey which can serve as an international guideline similar to the already existing descriptive sheets for other unifloral honeys.. Gudrun Beckh started a discussion on this topic asking who of the attendants had experience regarding Manuka honey. Asly Tanugur Samanci claimed that Manuka honeys were wrongly labelled in the USA market and Maria Campos suggested creating a group of Manuka pollen harmonization collecting data of several samples. Eventually, a possibility of a full day meeting about honey authenticity was discussed.

PROPOLIS GROUP: Miguel Vilas Boas explained the results of an inter-laboratory trial on propolis from several countries telling that a publication was almost ready and that he was going to send the draft to all participants in a short notice. He also talked about the work on propolis harmonization within ISO level. It was agreed that the next steps regarding propolis will be

methods harmonization and analysis of other propolis such as those from stingless bees, among others.

SENSORY ANALYSIS GROUP: Gian Luigi Marcazzan explained that the workshop had started the day before with the honey competition. He told that within the group, Mojca Korosec accomplished the sensory characterization of Slovenian Buckwheat honey. Gian Luigi Marcazzan also talked about the difficulties of carrying out a short workshop because there was not enough time to do all the tasks, including sample preparation and description of profiling methods. It was agreed that a 1-2 days workshop would be desirable in the future. Finally, ring trials of honeys sensory analyses were proposed as subsequent activities of the group.

After all summaries, there was a short debate about several issues.

1.-In respect of honey analysis, it was agreed that electrical conductivity analysis should be carried out on several unifloral honeys that exhibited high values of this parameter but were not included within the European regulation as honeys with high electrical conductivity (Official Journal of the European Communities. 2002. Council Directive 2001/110/EC of 20 December 2001 relating to honey). Results would be shared in the next IHC meeting.

2.-About having a legal standing, Adrian Bugeja Douglas started a brief dialogue about having or not legal statutes and Gudrun Beckh replied that we were not such a type of organization, being under the umbrella of Apimondia, so far.

3.-With regard to the IHC meeting and the conference:

(a) Adrian Bugeja Douglas suggested that the IHC should take full control of workshops and their organization, after knowing in advance the accurate number of participants and the speakers for the workshops. On this matter, Gudrun Beckh told that in Malta, people were confused regarding abstracts and presentations of the workshops and oral communications of the conference that sometimes overlapped.

(b) There were complaints about the poster presentation, because displaying the posters on screens did not allow the necessary discussion with the authors.

It was agreed that future meetings should be particularly careful about the two issues (a and b), mentioned above.

4.-Regarding ISO meeting in China, Gudrun Beckh informed that there had been a big and chaotic discussion about how to work and about the methodology. She suggested being focused on a product, because many countries already had enough experience on analytical

procedures. On Thursday 9 May, Etienne Bruneau went in depth, explaining several proposals that would be discussed in June 2019 in Paris. Teresa Sancho considered that among Etienne's proposals, the most important was setting a proper traceability scheme. Eventually, Gudrun Beckh urgently encouraged the participation of as many countries as possible in the ISO meetings.

Finally, Gudrun Beckh told that there were two proposals to hold the IHC meeting in 2020: one of them in Romania and the other one in Serbia. On Thursday, 9 May 2019 after listening to both proposals, there were 21 votes in favour of Serbia and 23 votes in favour of Romania, so that it was decided that the next IHC meeting was going to be held in Cluj Napoca (Romania) in Spring 2020, organized by Otilia Bobis.

Remarks/thoughts Gudrun for the future work of IHC:

- Ñ Ideas for new working groups or subgroups e.g. NMR, Metabarcoding?
- Ñ Focus in the working group should be harmonisation/methodology discussions/problems in routine testing/interpretation differences/ring trials and not listening to presentations. This should be limited to the symposium before the working group meetings

How can we achieve that?

- Ñ More initiatives from the members in advance is needed e.g. preparing specific cases of daily work causing problems in interpretations, claims from authorities ..
- Ñ Project on characterisation of monofloral honeys via sharing samples between different working groups and discussing the results thereof in the meetings
- Ñ More ring trials for standard quality parameters like enzyme activities (Diastase/Invertase/HMF/moisture), other ideas welcome
- Ñ Input from the work of our colleagues overseas? how can we achieve this?
- Ñ Continent representatives as former idea of Stefan reactivating? Could we have separate IHC continental meetings Asia, Americas? who would be willing to organize and take the lead?
- Ñ Carrying out separate meetings on specific topics, limited experienced participants like sensory and melissopalynology (pollen identification e.g. inviting experts from overseas) in order to "harmonise" methods and end up with publications

Regarding ring trials Dr. Lutz Elflein amended one point to the minutes:

- Ñ Within the authenticity group a ring trial for diastase by Phadebas was proposed by the Polish members. There seem to be problems with the published IHC formulas for the

calculation of the diastase numbers, especially for values ± 8 . This may indicate the need for an update.