

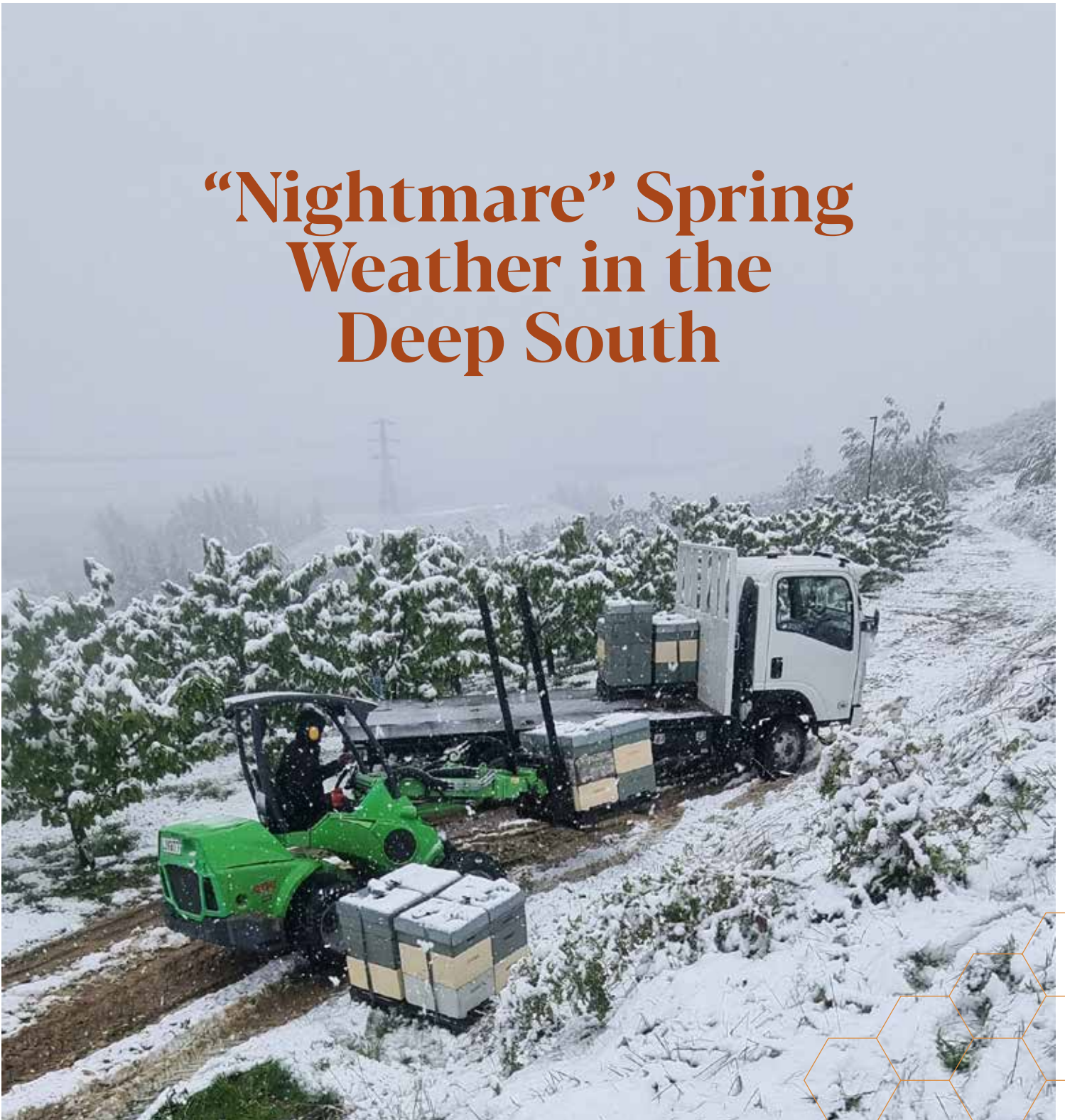
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APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers

“Nightmare” Spring Weather in the Deep South



Southern Beekeepers' "Nightmare" Weather



New Zealand, spread between the latitudes of 35° and 47° south, is notorious for its changeable spring weather patterns. This spring, beekeepers in the deep south have been forced to battle through the elements as snow dumps and record September rainfall made for challenging conditions for bees and beekeepers alike.

"I'll send you a photo of what I'm up to," says Peter Ward down the phone line from Central Otago.

Fighting fingers numbed by still-falling snow, the Alpine Honey Specialties owner is true to his word and seconds later a photo of he and his team moving hives out of a cherry orchard – included on this page – pings through.

"I think I will leave you to it today and touch base another day when you are tucked up in front of the fire," this reporter offers.

When we do catch up again Ward explains that it's not the first time he has had to "beekeep" in the snow.

"I have had three seasons now when I have been putting cells out as the snow comes through sideways. In 40 years, you get one of these every decade. It is not unheard of," Ward says.

The Labour Weekend cold snap will be leaving Otago cherry growers nervous as to the damage caused to plants. There appears to be a "reasonable fruit set", despite some unhelpful weather for large periods of the cherry flowering, Ward says.

"It has definitely been the wettest spring we have had for decades. There is no question about that. An incredible amount of rain."

While it has been challenging to get around the hives in Central Otago, willow and dandelion flows have been encouraging in October when the sun has shined, leaving Ward optimistic as to the condition of hives and the season ahead. He doesn't have to look far to find beekeepers who have had it tougher too he explains.

"Access has been difficult, but there is nowhere we haven't been able to get to. Not like in Southland, where it has been a nightmare. I have spoken to so many beekeepers down there who say it has been an absolute bloody nightmare down there. We've been more fortunate. You have to pick your days and areas, but we have been able to get around," Ward says.

Southland beekeepers spoken to by this reporter are putting a brave face on though, buoyed by a fine spell of weather in October, following the wettest September in 20 years in some parts of the district.



October 26, Labour Weekend, and Alpine Honey Specialties beekeepers brave a polar blast to remove hives from this Central Otago cherry orchard. Photo: Peter Ward.

"I've got the gummies on, the leggings on otop of the overalls, rubber gloves, the Line-7 jacket on top of it all, but after a while you get sick of all the dribbles running down your veil," explains Shaun Lawlor of Lawlor Apiaries in Gore.

He's been grafting queen cells every day through spring and thus has cells hatching every day, necessitating trips around the hives if at all possible. He still has two sites he hasn't been able to visit yet this spring though.

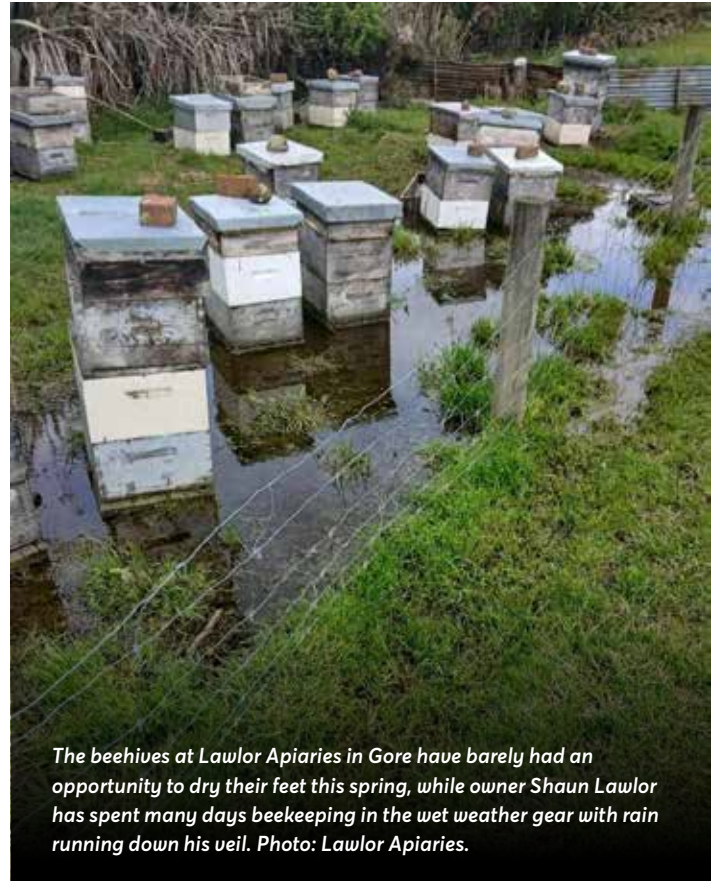
"They are sites that you need a week of good weather to get into and they are fine during the summer months. But we only seem to be getting a couple of fine days here at the moment before it starts raining again."

At Catlins Honey, located 15km north of Invercargill, Grant Hayes and his staff have also been doing their best to get through a record wet.

"We have been here 18 years and never seen it this wet. Saturated ground all the time. The smallest amount of rain causes more flooding in the paddocks, because everything is just so saturated. Trying to get around the bees is just a nightmare," Hayes says.

When they can get to the hives, there has been more feeding than usual required.

"We have been losing more hives to starvation because we just can't get there in time. All in all, the hives are not in too bad of shape though. They came through winter stronger than usual. We are just late. Treatments went in late, because we couldn't get there in time, swarming season has just started and we can't get around them to do swarm prevention. We are late splitting. Every



The beehives at Lawlor Apiaries in Gore have barely had an opportunity to dry their feet this spring, while owner Shaun Lawlor has spent many days beekeeping in the wet weather gear with rain running down his veil. Photo: Lawlor Apiaries.

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time you think you are catching up a bit, the weather just bites you in the bum again."

Further west, based just outside of Te Anau, George Bell of Southern Lakes Honey is reporting "six straight weeks of rain" from late August, through to the first week of October. He tipped 380mm of rain out of the gauge at his shed in September, but has apiary sites where over 700mm fell in the month.

"There was a period there where we just couldn't do any beekeeping, you would just get stuck. People were getting stuck on the side of the road," Bell says.

"It was pretty tough. The hives had no pollen left in them and the queens had almost stopped laying right through September. Just no pollen, at all. Even if they did get flying, there was nothing to bring in, because it had been raining so much."

October saw some respite for bees and beekeepers though, and the apiarists of Southland are reporting colonies that are now building up well ahead of anticipated December honey flows. There is even optimism that there was enough sun and warmth in October to provide for queen mating success, which will be assessed in November.

"The funny thing is, it might have been incredibly wet, but when it hasn't been raining it hasn't been blowing. We would normally get south-westerlies which makes it incredibly cold. Then, of late, we have actually had some nice days and any queens may have got nicely mated," Lawlor says.

"They have actually built up quite nicely in the last couple of weeks and I am doing a heck of a lot of splits at the moment."

And while the deep south might throw up some serious weather challenges in spring, the grey rain clouds are not without a silver lining.

"The advantage of down here, because our main honey flow is so late, we get a bit longer to build the hives up," Lawlor adds. 🐝



While the gravelled tracks might be passable, flooded paddocks have severely limited access to apiaries in Southland this spring and some have yet to be visited due to access issues. Photo: Catlins Honey.

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NZ Honey Industry “In Deep Crisis for Survival”, Comvita Tells Shareholder Meeting



BY BRUCE ROSCOE

The New Zealand honey industry is in “deep crisis for survival”, stabilisation will take “several years”, the United States has overtaken China as the largest – but also “cheapest” – New Zealand market for mānuka honey, and Comvita Ltd is renegotiating its banking covenants and preparing to sell land, among other assets.

This bleak state and outlook were delivered to Comvita investors at the company’s 30 October annual shareholder meeting held in Pāpāmoa and online. (Apiarist’s Advocate has obtained the addresses to the meeting by incoming chair Bridget Coates and acting – and returning – chief executive officer Brett Hewlett.)

On the home front, “Current prices and volumes deployed by too many manuka honey producers, exporters and labels (we cannot refer to these as brands) just cannot be sustained”, Hewlett’s address said.

The “poor quality” sold by many brands was a concern. In a shock revelation, the address recounted that a recent UMF Honey Association survey showed an “alarming number” of cases of non-compliance to agreed standards for UMF honey.

Hewlett’s address reported on the first leg of his “listen, learn and understand” tour. He has visited China, Hong Kong, Singapore and the US since the beginning of September. He was scheduled to visit China again, followed by visits to Korea and

Japan after the meeting. In between the overseas tours he “spent time out in the field with beekeepers and landowners”.

Comvita acting-CEO Brett Hewlett is mid-way through a “listen, learn and understand” tour of key markets for the mānuka honey seller and, so far, his report is bleak.

Comvita board chair Bridget Coates’ address to shareholders said they are up against competitors who “dump product at low margins” in both the US and China.



Comvita was witnessing a “slowing of demand” across all markets. “Luxury or premium brands have been most materially impacted as consumers are tending to trade down, looking for bargains or more frugal offerings.”

Chinese consumers were gravitating toward domestic brands or opting for more “personalized and culturally relevant products”. They were also travelling again and now spent about 40% of their luxury budget outside of China.

Pressure on margins in the US was “intense” and US consumers had “become confused by the mixed and often conflicting messages on the value proposition for mānuka honey”.

Coates’ address noted that competitors were willing to “dump product at low margins” in both the US and China.

Comvita’s response to the market malaise is the “reshaping” of all product ranges and complete “rethinking” of channels to market. Reflecting a belief that the market for “health and wellness” products has potential to outgrow that for mānuka honey, the company is focusing on products in that category that use mānuka as an ingredient, Hewlett’s address explained.

Comvita now had “more than 6000 hectares of mānuka forests under direct control”. This asset in future would supply 40% of total volume requirement, up from the 30% share expected to be held by Comvita-owned apiaries by March end 2025. The company would turn to the “spot market” for the remainder.

Investment in plant modernisation (manufacturing, laboratory, and IT) was a “sunk cost” that allowed a threefold expansion in “current throughput”, which implies a current plant operating rate of 33%.

Comvita is renegotiating its banking covenants and striving to complete the sale of “non-strategic” land and other assets by March 2025, the addresses noted.

Comvita shares closed at NZD1.18 on 31 October, down 62% on the year-ago price. They are trading at a 43% discount to the company’s net asset value as stated at 30 June. 🐝



With a share price of NZD1.18 (31 October close), signalling a 62% decline on the year-ago price, Comvita has attempted to put context around their performance in a recent address to shareholders.

New Zealand Beekeeping Inc Industry Strategy – Competing or Complementary?



Critical of Apiculture New Zealand's (ApiNZ) *Honey Strategy 2024-2030* since its release in February, fellow industry body New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated (NZBI) are workshopping their own 'Industry Strategy'. We explore why it was created, what is included, and how it sits in comparison to the existing strategy of ApiNZ.

Running to six pages, the authors at NZBI seem at pains to reinforce its 'work-in-progress' status – with a somewhat repetitious title of NZ *Beekeeping Draft Proposed Industry Strategy* and a 'DRAFT' watermark backgrounding each page. Despite this, on September 30 it was circulated to members and those who had attended NZBI "Discussion Days" between May 25 and June 15 around the country. An open-invite was also offered to a meeting in Hamilton on October 5 to discuss the strategy, which was also streamed online and doubled as NZBI's AGM.

The winter Discussion Days saw NZBI executive canvass beekeeper opinion on a range of industry issues and president Jane Lorimer says these discussions informed the strategy. The result? NZBI believe a specific advocacy group for commercial beekeepers is required.

"This way the exporters and beekeepers would have a separate, specific body to represent their needs. This means that there is no conflict. There could be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between both groups to say that they will communicate on a regular basis on matters that may be of interest to both parties

and establish ways to work together," the draft strategy outlines.

NZBI acknowledges this approach to be in contrast to ApiNZ's strategy – which was written in partnership with UMF Honey Association (UMFHA) – of an umbrella organisation where both beekeepers and honey packers and exporters are represented. However, NZBI believe it should be an appealing proposition to honey exporters because "it lets them focus on exports and export standards" and "it gets small and medium beekeepers off their back, and lets someone else deal with issues of pollination and biosecurity".

The NZBI document describes a "twin-set" of problems besetting apiculture, with bee health "which requires constant monitoring" and biosecurity risks grouped together and alongside "the commercial fate of the industry, both immediately and in the longer term". For the later the collective and individual efforts to support and market honey, pollination and "other" goods and services require a shared understanding of a relevant strategy, the document states.

Drilling down further, the draft strategy identifies areas where action is needed, including a more robust sentinel hive programme to identify biosecurity incursions; greater education around varroa and American foulbrood (AFB); efforts to reduce compliance costs; investment in stronger relationships with pollination relevant industries; and various honey marketing activities from a coordinated domestic approach, to complimentary market access and "marketing collateral development".

"It has taken over 30 years to get Manuka to where it is today – currently in the doldrums, the word Manuka has not been protected for solely New Zealand use and many countries with much larger land areas are planting Manuka to then produce and sell their own active product. We need a pipeline of new honeys and honey research, otherwise honey will revert to a commodity product," the strategy outlines.

There is a level of cross-over between the strategies of ApiNZ and NZBI, such as the need to grow value in honey and develop a better prepared biosecurity



New Zealand Beekeeping Inc. president Jane Lorimer believes beekeepers want, and need, an industry body separate to that of honey exporters and packers, and they are working to finalise a strategy to that end.

plan, but also significant areas where they diverge from one another. Looming over the two groups' plans is the philosophical difference of whose interests any emerging industry body can, and should, represent.

The NZBI strategy document calls ApiNZ and UMFHAs' plans a "merger" between the two organisations and claims such a move "will substantially leave beekeepers without an advocacy body, as the merged body's focus is said to be on Manuka exports".

It goes on to say, "This highlights the fundamental issue: beekeepers' interests are not the same as exporters. Having one organisation try to advocate for both groups has muffled beekeepers' voice. It will get worse under ApiNZ's proposals. Exporters will dominate, whatever is now being said. A UMFHA merger means an export focus."



ApiNZ chief executive Karin Kos and UMFHA equivalent Tony Wright are in strong disagreement with this stance. Kos says their proposal of an "aligned industry organisation that represents and advocates for all value chain participants, from beekeepers to packers and exporters, will best position the industry in its aim to become sustainable".

"There are good reasons for this. Better decision making that considers all parts of the industry's interests will be more effective in reflecting everyone's ambition to realise a better future. We've seen the benefit of that in ApiNZ's broad representative model and we believe it is the only way our sector will be able to effectively achieve its goals," Kos says.

Wright is in lockstep with that point of view.

"We are confident that the future success of the industry requires closer collaboration when it comes to addressing industry change to create value for stakeholders," the UMFHA chief executive says.

"An industry structure that brings all players closer together to share insights, data and create world class solutions to challenges remains the best path forward. We recognise there will always be differing positions, however our extensive and ongoing consultation with industry members and other primary sectors has given us no reason for a fundamental change in direction."



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ApiNZ has been operating since 2016, when it was formed following a merger of the National Beekeepers' Association (NBA) and Federated Farmers beekeeping division.

"Commercial beekeepers will continue to have key decision-making roles in the new organisation, including good representation at a board level. And as we've publicly acknowledged in our discussions with beekeepers around the country, the new organisation will aim to build regional networks for commercial beekeepers to participate in more easily," Kos says of the ApiNZ plan.

The later point is a key area where the two groups align. NZBI's strategy document is highly critical of beekeepers' ability to put forward ideas which shape ApiNZ's direction, criticising it for being a "top-down organisation". Their solution is a somewhat back-to-the-future approach.

"Whilst the NBA structure and function was not perfect, we think that something similar could be used to help get more beekeepers involved in shaping their future. Funding of a new organisation that will be effective will be the issue," the NZBI document announces.

More than just being "the issue", the document leads its *Funding the new organisation* section with the simple sentence: "This is tough."

A pros and cons table follows, outlining three funding options: voluntary subscription; commodity levy; and funding via the AFB Pest Management Plan. The later seems a long-shot, with the

cons section including an admission that the feasibility has not been investigated and that a change in legislation is likely needed.

While a full and final Strategy for the beekeeping industry has not been released – and there is no timeline in place to do so yet according to Lorimer – the NZBI president says feedback to their draft proposal has been encouraging. She says she sees the strategies of NZBI and ApiNZ as not competing, but "rather they would complement each other without conflict".

"Where there are areas of common interest to be progressed a MOU should be established," she reinforced.

A NZBI delegation met with Ministry for Primary Industries officials in Wellington on October 30 for "a brief meeting to outline the issues" raised in their strategy.

"We will then go back to MPI in a couple of weeks' time, to see how they have considered the issues and what they believe is the way forward to get stuff done for the beekeeping sector ... we have left the ball in their court to think about it for a bit," Lorimer says.

Not in the diary that day in Wellington was a meeting with ApiNZ, so to what extent the two strategies might "complement" one another remains unanswered. ApiNZ have left that door ajar though, as Kos says they anticipate sharing more on the proposed structure of their plans in the coming weeks, adding "as always, we are very open to any discussions other groups may want to have on this as we move forward". 🐝

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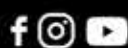
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Talk to the Elephants – and Enlarge the View of the Blinkered Honey Strategies



BY BRUCE ROSCOE

Two honey strategy documents are before the industry. Apiculture New Zealand Inc. (ApiNZ) released the first effort in February. New Zealand Beekeeping Inc.'s (NZBI) contribution surfaced in October. Though at once a symbol of disunity, the competing strategies betray a shared sense of crisis.

The purveyors of the world's most expensive honey appear unable to turn a profit (read Comvita's NZD77m loss in 2024), more has been produced than can possibly be sold in five or more years, and the anchors of the entire industry — the beekeepers — are signalling the bridge to be wound up.

Industry participants and observers will see much of value in both strategy documents (hereafter, documents) — action plans for bee health; bolstered biosecurity; improved intra-industry communications; the expression of one voice to regulators; funding

to chart a course through current turbulence and into a hopeful future; a single industry body that engenders cooperation over conflict and unites the warring factions; and more.

In the under-funded honey industry, community-oriented work typically is volunteered. Those who benefit are thankful for the effort and hours that have been contributed. Differences of opinion are met by conciliatory comments rather than combative criticism. It's understood that if 20 beekeepers occupy a room, 20 (or more!) differing opinions on a wide range of subjects are likely to be aired.



When it comes to the honey industry strategies put forward by both Apiculture NZ and NZ Beekeeping Inc, there are some omissions akin to "elephants in the front room of the honey house", according to Bruce Roscoe.

THE ELEPHANTS AND THE HANDPRINT

The ApiNZ document — *"Thriving Together: Futureproofing New Zealand Apiculture 2024-2030"* — does not reflect community effort. And what it omits to say or see is substantial. More than one elephant resides in the front room of this honey house. Before we visit the largest of the resident Proboscidea, let's pause to consider the authorship and funding of the strategy.

Although ApiNZ states that it originated the project, the UMF Honey Association's (UMFHA) handprint is large. The public-relations (PR) writing style of the UMFHA's website and the document is all but identical in large sections. And as *Apiarist's Advocate* reported in March, UMFHA chief executive Tony Wright, who serves also as an ApiNZ director, was "heavily involved" in determining the "final shape" the strategy would take.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and industry participants have co-funded the ApiNZ document production and strategy implementation in two tranches. Under the formal name, "Securing a Resilient and Sustainable Future: Strategic Planning for the Sustainable Growth of the Honey Sector", NZD385,500 was earmarked for the project for the period March 2022-December 2023. MPI contributed NZD225,000 to which ApiNZ, Comvita Ltd, Mānuka Health New Zealand Ltd, and NZ Honey Industry Trust added in sum NZD158,500. The second tranche (for two years from May 2024) comprises a NZD309,000 commitment from MPI to which UMFHA as co-funding industry participant has added

NZD181,000. The war chest (well, peace chest if the PR is to be believed) thus totals NZD875,500.

UMFHA's enthusiasm to co-fund an industry-wide plan that would benefit all honey types is revealing. In a column in the May edition of this journal, Wright said that during an overseas marketing trip he had found himself with a "broader job to do" which was to promote and defend the mānuka honey category "for the benefit of all New Zealanders". Underlying such altruistic sentiment this writer sees a deeply invested UMFHA interest in campaigning for the early founding of a well-funded new industry body. The greatest benefit to UMFHA would be the almost certain ability to transfer all costs associated with the effort to secure a certification trademark (hereafter, trademark) for mānuka honey.

Those costs extend well beyond the amounts incurred for filings in various intellectual property (IP) courts. An entire Māori infrastructure has been created on the assumption that the trademark would be granted at least in New Zealand. After deliberations that spanned nearly eight years, the Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand (NZIPO) rejected the trademark application filed by the Mānuka Honey Appellation Society (MHAS; a UMFHA-related body that shares the UMFHA address and CEO).

Yet the premature infrastructure — specifically the Mānuka Charitable Trust and its 100%-owned Te Pitau Ltd — require continual funding. The cost of that funding (with the exception of a Provincial Growth Fund contribution in 2019) was and remains solely for the UMFHA / MHAS account.

The September 2020 edition of *New Zealand Beekeeper* described Te Pitau Ltd as the "operating" arm of Mānuka Charitable Trust — "operating" in quotation marks because Te Pitau Ltd operates to no office or telephone number or email address, nor does it maintain a website. The website begun for Mānuka Charitable Trust in early 2021 remains "under construction" today and can be seen at www.mct.nz.



Prices for mānuka honey have been slashed, such as this October sale of Comvita product in Japan, the result of high levels of honey production as compared to international demand.

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The ApiNZ document references taonga and “Mānuka Charitable Trust” five times each in sentences that read to this writer as obligatory statements of political correctness. For example, “With the support of the Mānuka Charitable Trust... Māori and industry will work in partnership to protect our Māori taonga...” The actual politics involved are more complicated than observers would imagine.

A POLITICAL MANOEUVRE

In a complex political manoeuvre (read late whisky nights in Wellington), both Te Pitau Ltd and Mānuka Charitable Trust were registered in December 2019 and February 2020 to 15 Show Place, Addington, Christchurch. That is the address of Ngāi Tahu, the principal iwi of the South Island. Just six days after the Australian Mānuka Honey Association (AMHA) on 21 July 2018 had lodged opposition with IPONZ to the trademark, Ngāi Tahu also opposed either the application or an early award of the application. AMHA's opposition succeeded; Ngāi Tahu's was withdrawn. UMFHA's early (and documented) intention to charge for use of the trademark, should such be awarded, had triggered Ngāi Tahu's opposition.

UMFHA has spent NZD3.3m on IP creation and protection in its March 2017-2024 years. The trademark case absorbed an undisclosed share of that amount, but the extent to which UMFHA and MHAS accounts may be commingled is unknown. Costs continue to mount. Funding Te Pitau and Mānuka Charitable Trust through “donations” stripped UMFHA's budget of NZD510,000 and NZD685,957 in the March 2023 and March 2024 years. (Unexplained “targeted funds” are included in the same category and may or may not relate to Te Pitau or Mānuka Charitable Trust.)

UMFHA has budgeted same-category spending of NZD500,000 in its current financial year. The March 2024 year “donation” accounted for as much as 39.0% of the association's total expenses.

The impetus behind the formation of a new industry body now focuses on a pinpoint. It is all but inconceivable that UMFHA dissolves itself at the time the new body is formed. For one thing, the large contingent of offshore licensees could not easily be rehoused. But UMFHA would fairly expect that such a body that represents the industry as a whole and is funded by a universal

levy to assume the trademark and related infrastructure expenses. After all, we are now united. On team NZ, aren't we?

The mānuka trademark train, like a toy model on a circular track, cannot reach any destination. It will pull into a funding station at regular intervals and resume its start-to-start journey. That is how this writer felt after twice reading the rejections of the trademark application by NZIPO (22 May 2023; 171 pages; [2023] NZIPOTM19) and earlier by the UK Intellectual Property Office (13 Dec. 2021; 39 pages; 0-899-21).

THE LOST VALUE

The surrender of added value through bulk exports seems of negligible concern to the strategy, yet this issue personifies the African savanna elephant, the largest of the species.

For all honey types exported in CY2019-CY2023 the lost value reached NZD178.7m, 3.6 times more than the NZD49.6m forfeited in CY2014-CY2018. The value lost in CY2020 alone reached NZD75.2m, or an average NZD8,580 each hour of each day. We can calculate the lost value by multiplying bulk honey export volume by the price differential between bulk and retail pack honey exports.

(Bulk exports typify the trading pattern between developed and developing countries. Value is maximized in the developed country through the creation of processing jobs at food factories, the use of compatriot suppliers for processing equipment and food containers, and business flow-on to companies on the periphery of the production.)

FEW WORDS ALLOTTED TO BULK HONEY ISSUE

The NZBI document doesn't so much as mention the term “bulk exports”. The ApiNZ document contains about 5,700 words. Of those, 14 are allotted to the subject of bulk exports — “bulk export levy model to ensure quality and value is (sic) retained in New Zealand”. These words are found not in the text body, but in a summary table on page 13 (unnumbered).

The ApiNZ strategy's companion Question and Answer note advises: “Any imposition of a regulated levy will require a vote from those who would be asked to pay it”. As applied to the issue of bulk exports, this appears disingenuous and borders on the

Honey floral variety by packaging type (volume, tonnes) 2023



unserious. All know that bulk exporters would not agree to a levy. But there are at least three other ways in which the lost value could be reclaimed in an amount in the low millions of dollars that could be used to fund product education and the development of new markets for retail pack exports. The Scotch Whisky Association's method for one category of non-premium product has much to teach.

It seems unlikely that the authors of the ApiNZ strategy, who include and represent honey exporters, unintentionally omitted the issue of bulk exports. It is instructive, too, to note that the trademark applications used the words "mānuka honey produced in New Zealand". That wording accommodates bulk exports and the oxygenation of offshore mānuka brands that compete against retail pack product exported from New Zealand. When queried in March 2021 on the wording "mānuka honey produced" rather than "retail pack mānuka honey produced", John Rawcliffe, then UMFHA administrator, replied:

"...there are a number of producers that sell bulk honey as a cash flow backup, to get Industry buy in (which is a must for this to work) produced in NZ was the only option to start with".

The trademark cases were good ones to lose. They were circular and self-defeating. Can we imagine Scotch whisky distillers, Champagne Houses, or Japanese sake brewers surrendering added value and quality control by permitting the bottling of their products offshore under alien labels? The question is rhetorical. It is already understood that the whisky, champagne, or sake would be protected as precious taonga.



Industry participants will see much of value in Apiculture NZ's Honey Industry Strategy, released in February, but it is what isn't included, "the elephants in the front room of the honey house", which need addressing, writes Bruce Roscoe.

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A DIFFERENT PLANET

Graphs in ApiNZ's document are unnumbered and the data in them unsourced. No estimates are sourced. CAGR does not abbreviate "cumulative average growth rate" — the correct term is "compound annual growth rate".

The NZD1b revenue growth target for 2030 is variously conflated as a "NZ honey" and a "mānuka honey" goal. If all honey types was meant, meeting that goal would require an additional NZD100m in annual honey export revenues (on which planet?) over the CY2023 total of NZD395.6m. Readers may feel entitled to credible assumptions and calculations.

A revenue-doubling goal appears simplistic, even naive. There may be a trickle down to beekeepers, but trickle-down economics has been widely discredited as the well-funded are inclined to spend on themselves. In any event, the industry in the 10 years to CY2023 did double export revenue to NZD395.6m. How did that work out? A more meaningful goal is to raise the share of offshore retail prices that is returned to New Zealand.

PIPE DREAMS

Neither importers nor wholesalers would recognise sense or reason in the ApiNZ pipe dream that "...securing mānuka honey as being uniquely from New Zealand will create a bigger stage for other unique honeys". The opposite is more the case.

Upmarket retail knows that at least three grades of mānuka honey must be stocked. Buyers also know that they cannot rely on one supplier for uninterrupted supply. So, the product of two or more brands is stocked. As a result, at least six mānuka honey products are seen on shelves. If buyers wish to add more, they are likely to choose a lower price point "multifloral" mānuka.

Unlike the case of a market such as New Zealand that is closed to foreign honeys, upmarket retail in Japan, for example, often stocks honeys imported from countries as diverse as Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Myanmar, Mexico, Romania, Spain, and the United States, not to mention a selection of locally produced honeys. Amid such choice and competition, buyers only rarely consider New Zealand honey types other than mānuka.

STORY-TELLING IS FOR CHILDREN

The ApiNZ strategy is silent on "product knowledge" while extolling the New Zealand honey or mānuka "story" in headings and text 15 times. Story-telling is for children.

In this writer's advisory association with honey importing and wholesaling I have read many inquiries for trade. When such are tested with a request for explanation of each numerical value on the candidate honey product label, often trotted out in response are the tired lines, "It's pure" or "It's natural" or "It's from New Zealand" or, in one collector's item case, "We don't need to know that". Yet the marketers of successful and protected brands that achieve a global presence will understand all that is understandable about their products rather than default to a country of origin "story".

Only one respondent has been able to answer the question, "Are the nutritional information panel (NIP) data generic or the result of analysis of the specific floral source of the honey? If generic, what is the source of the data?"

Only one packer has understood why a fat amount printed in an NIP should be greater than zero.

Beware the "New Zealand Story". It seems universally to substitute for product knowledge and packing expertise. It did not assist the roundly defeated trademark applications. It did not protect against

widespread glyphosate contamination of multiple honey types. It does not answer questions asked by importers, wholesalers, or consumers in export markets. It could disastrously link to an expose of the quality of river water that bees drink. Only the NZBI document addresses product knowledge, advising in summary "Highlight the goodness of honey with vitamins, minerals, and enzymes..."

MĀNUKA AS A CYCLICAL COMMODITY

NZBI frets that without a "pipeline of new honeys and honey research", New Zealand honey "will revert to a commodity product". It has already become such. The industry is in a phase of "ex-growth". Honey export volumes and values have declined in consecutive years since the CY2020 peak. The Japan unit of Comvita Ltd is not alone in discounting mānuka products by as much as 50%. Considering that the trade will not reduce to zero, at some point the downturn will bottom out and upswing follow to birth the first cycle.

NO COMMITMENT TO FAIR TRADE

Both ApiNZ and NZBI are silent on the importance of adhering to fair trade practices. A commitment to such could begin with a promise not to brand build on the back of unpaid and child labour (see Employment Court ruling [2022]NZEmpC77EMPC363/2021). This elephant should be acknowledged. NZBI's website at least notes the "need to encourage good ethics and practices in Beekeeping and in the marketing of bee related products", while



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both ApiNZ and NZBI logos adorn the *New Zealand Honeybee Care Code* – but this supports “bee welfare” and not human.

‘FORMULAIC’ CONSULTATION

UMFHA’s website states: “Today we represent beekeepers, processors and marketers...” ApiNZ says: “We are a voluntary membership organization representing New Zealand beekeepers”. NZBI: “Our desire is to be the voice of NZ Beekeeping”. Those beekeepers who remain must feel the love of over-representation

NZBI, whose document reads as heartfelt, fears that a new, export-focused body will muffle beekeepers. Observers must await details of the proposed body before deriding the effort to establish it. But we are not frogs in wells whose sky view is limited to the diameter of the well. Dairy farmers and kiwifruit orchardists seem to make reasonable-to-good livings. Both have robust producer-only associations with strength of voice to keep exporters on their toes. The website of New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Inc. is a guide.

Neither ApiNZ nor UMFHA appears informed by examples of offshore beverage and food producer and seller associations that have achieved the goals set out in the ApiNZ document, such as IP protection which speaks to brand strength that defeats commoditisation.

The Champagne Houses, the Scotch Whisky Association, and the Idaho Potato Commission also have much to teach, as does, this writer believes, the system of cooperatives operated by Japan Agriculture. (The underlying philosophy of the Japanese

association is that farmers’ incomes should be comparable to the incomes of city folk.)

The problems that beset the honey industry appear deeply structural. A universal levy collected and disbursed by the same sector doyens operating now as then seems an unlikely solution. Though one should not prejudge the effort, the intention underpinning the public expression of the plans warrants scrutiny.

The ApiNZ document to this writer reads as a *fait accompli* — an example of formulaic “consultation” replete with the invitation to provide “feedback” extended months after a course has been charted and key framework details agreed. ApiNZ’s extravagant use of PR jargon — words such as “driver”, “empower”, “transparent” on repeat play — all but gives the show away.

BEWARE THE ELEPHANTS

Elephants, the largest of the land mammals, possess exceptional intelligence and memory. They also epitomize the basic law of the wild that big things are dangerous. An indoors charge would destroy the honey house. It is vital to talk to them rather than, in myopic view, behave as though they are not there.

Bruce Roscoe is a Japan-based New Zealander providing honey importation and distribution consultancy. He is a former director of research for Deutsche Bank Securities Japan, with extensive experience as an equity research analyst and as correspondent for both leading New Zealand and global media publications. 🐝

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The Face Behind the Facebook



Curious as to the motivation, remuneration and hours required to be an administrator of Backyard Beekeeping NZ's Facebook page of more than 17,000 members, Maggie James chats with Wellington beekeeping enthusiast Dave Hodson. She uncovers an individual of varied roles, responsibilities and interests – from policing the page, to a career in government data, business and policy analytics, a penchant for trout fishing, and even a six-year stint as a professional online poker player.

BY MAGGIE JAMES

At a time in the New Zealand beekeeping industry when many beekeeping communication channels don't appear overly strong, I was keen to explore why the Backyard Beekeeping NZ Facebook page has such a large following – 17,219 at time of writing – particularly when just 8223 people are recorded as registered beekeepers in New Zealand with the American foulbrood (AFB) Pest Management Plan Agency as at 31 August 2024.

Despite a reduction in hive numbers and beekeepers in recent years, in September 2024 Facebook Insights reveal there were approximately 53 posts, 984 comments, 1839 reactions, and, gobsmackingly, 28,109 visits to the Backyard Beekeeping NZ page that month.

"The Backyard Beekeepers NZ community, with its questions, mentoring, and aiding good decision making, fills a gap between when beekeeping clubs do not meet, plus many beekeepers don't have a club nearby," Hodson says.

"I am keen on making beekeepers aware of their legal obligations – with relevance to AFB – and it's not uncommon for an

AFB "victim" to be offered a replacement nuc colony by one of this Facebook community."

The page has been running since early 2015, with Hodson asked to come on board as an administrator not long after. There is an almost even mix of male and female members, which vary in age from 13 years old to '65+'. With New Zealand's decreasing hive numbers has come a decreasing of posts, and there appears to be fewer brand-new beekeepers recently. Ten years ago there was a major flux of the 'Save The Bees' brigade.

Many of the postings do appear to be cyclic e.g. currently including members of the public wanting someone to uplift a swarm, newer beekeepers requesting help with their Certificate of Inspection (COI), or 'why has my caught swarm got two queens?'

I was interested in how many hours per week Hodson dedicates to administration duties. Amazingly, he says its only approximately one to three hours weekly, or five to ten minutes a day. The role is shared with his co-administrator, Taranaki-based horticulturalist and long-time beekeeper Vance Hooper, who Hodson has never met in person.



Hodson is not paid, regarding his input as his volunteer effort to the beekeeping industry. In the past he has been approached by commercial backers, but likes that the Facebook site is an independent voice. There is no financial cost to running the page.

Hodson says he is fortunate in that, generally, the Backyard Beekeeping NZ community is "self-moderating". Individuals posting do have the luxury of deleting their posts. Sometimes there are a few polarising personalities that get people fired up, and, unsurprisingly, these provocative posts garner the most interaction. Occasionally, Hodson will silence the most provocative for 30 days, and postings within that period go via the administrators for clearance before appearing on the page.

"Those banned include a lot of people who have nothing to do with beekeeping or New Zealand and have tried to post videos," Hodson explains.

"There are a few people who have repeatedly posted non-beekeeping stuff. Those that constantly have a bad opinion of everyone get a short shift! Marital splits, with one party trying to sell gear, are also a no-no, along with reports of stolen beehives. I don't regard this page as an opportunity to have a trial as to whether hives are stolen, and those attempting to post these accusations, rightly or wrongly, are told to report the matter to police.

Administrator Dave Hodson's Advice When Posting on Backyard Beekeepers NZ Facebook

- Don't forget it's people you are communicating with – "talk" like a person facing a person.
- Read the replies to your posts, before rewording your original question.
- Don't assume people are trying to be dicks when they innocently ask or answer a question.
- Use measured language.
- Don't be reactive.
- Type with a smile.
- Don't drink and type.
- Using the page's search button is great, to seek previous posts like yours and read previous posts.
- All used honey bee beekeeping equipment and bee sales must quote the beekeeper's New Zealand registration ID.
- Honey sales must be extracted and packed under an RMP or NP1.
- Do as I say, not always as I do!

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Also, unless impacting on beekeeping, this is a non-Covid and non-1080 page," he says, referencing topics which often drawn unsolicited online opinions in abundance.

Despite this, Hodson says threats have been made to his life on another page because he deleted posts regarding 1080 on Backyard Beekeepers NZ. He contacted the administrator of that Facebook page and was told the perpetrator had been banned.

THE BEEKEEPER BEHIND THE BEEKEEPING PAGE

While now an advocate for Langstroth hives, Hodson's beekeeping career began in Dunedin after a topbar bee hive building course.

"This was in the period that the 'save the bees' and 'topbars are more natural' voices were everywhere," he says.

The topbar hive was populated and Hodson soon learnt the various pros and cons associated with the space constraints of this type of hive.

"Somehow, in the *how do we get bees?* exercise, I ended up talking to Murray Rixon who was recently returned to Dunedin, and in the process of setting up a hive rental business. I ended up being his test customer, and basically got a lot of valuable in-the-hive tuition from him for next to no cost for our annual rental fee, along with our guaranteed annual honey whenever it suited."

Hodson then obtained his own bees in a Langstroth hive, and watched a lot of beekeeping videos and hassled his bees a fair bit.

"I was active on the Backyard Beekeeping NZ FB page, and I viewed many videos. Trevor Gillbanks, Trevs Bees, are an amazing source of informative videos aimed at beginners. I think Trev should be knighted for his services to the industry with these videos!

I was also cavalier about the need for bee suits or a smoker, and eventually learned the lesson that most such beginners learn – involving a bee that got stuck a long way up my nostril. Subsequently I started wearing a veil and using a smoker more often. An older beekeeper at the local hobbyist bee club reiterated this practise totally sagely stating 'at least wear sunglasses, you are a long time blind!'"

For a couple of years Hodson helped out a small-scale commercial beekeeper in Otago, which provided a lot more time in beehives and an accelerated learning curve. That included a lesson on carrying out full hive inspections in a large apiary full of big hives, during rough weather, wearing sneakers and a half suit only!

In 2015, along with being made an administrator of Backyard Beekeepers NZ, Hodson moved to Wellington. His Dunedin hives, other than those on his rental property, were sold. These hives were run remotely from Wellington with his tenants' help, while also coming and going a bit!

There was an urban apiary in Wellington. Plus, a Taranaki apiary on land owned and farmed by his father. This site is at the end of a gravel road where commercial beekeeper and uncle Arthur Hodson from Fielding, previously had an apiary.

MORE THAN JUST BEES

Hodson, age 47 years, holds a BA in Maths, BSc in Ecology, along with some Post Graduate study in ecology. Now "between jobs", he has been a policy and data analyst since 2015, working in emissions trading related teams at the Environmental Protection Authority and the Ministry for the Environment.

If something spins Hodson's wheels, he gets obsessive, and from 2009 to 2015 that was playing online poker.

"At first the online poker was lucrative, enabling a living which gave me time for beekeeping! However, with the rise of artificial intelligence in Eastern Europe, coupled with the declining US dollar, I started to earn less than the minimum wage. Initially poker only required a few hours to be lucrative, then not so, and increasing hours to earn less did not appeal. In Eastern Europe, one US dollar goes a long way, but not so far here, where there is a higher cost of living," Hodson explains.

Complementing the online activities, Hodson is also a keen fisherman and relishes catching delicious sea run brown trout in the tidal range near river mouths, particularly when they return for spawning. Earlier in his working life he also spent time living in Golden Bay, fruit picking and working as a wilderness guide.

Such adventures in the New Zealand outdoors and inside his beehives will soon be in the rear vision mirror though, with Hodson's German partner Svenja pregnant and the couple have decided to live in Germany for the next two to three years, departing 29 November. All but the Taranaki hives have been sold, and this site will be handed over to his father Rex, an ex-shearer who is looking forward to registering as a beekeeper and continuing the Hodson family tradition on their farm.

However, Dave Hodson's administrator duties and Backyard Beekeeping NZ posts will continue, albeit from Germany – likely in the middle of the New Zealand night.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this story with Dave Hodson, PM via Backyard Beekeeping NZ on Facebook or email dave.hodsonz@gmail.com 🐝



Dave Hodson with a tasty brown trout catch at the mouth of the Haast River, Westland. Photo: Annika Korsten.

A 2024 NZ Colony Loss Survey Update & Reminder



Col Loss Survey author Pike Stahlmann-Brown gives beekeepers who haven't yet completed the survey this gentle nudge, just weeks out from the deadline...

BY PIKE STAHLMANN-BROWN

Thanks to the 2,400 beekeepers who have already finished the 2024 NZ Colony Loss Survey! Beekeepers who have not yet completed the survey should have received an email reminder with a link to the survey on 1 November. The survey closes at the end of the month.

In addition to colony losses, the 2024 survey covers varroa management, queen replacement, pollination, wasps, and activities related to beekeeping (like attending bee clubs and field days and helping others learn about bees). There's also a short

section on beekeepers' confidence in New Zealand's biosecurity system. Read more about it in my Q&A with *Apiarist's Advocate* last month.

So far, the 2024 survey is taking hobbyists less than 10 minutes and commercials less than 20 minutes to complete, on average. Beekeepers with apiary registrations, but who aren't currently keeping bees, are also encouraged to participate.

If you haven't completed the 2024 survey and you didn't receive an email reminder, please send your apiary registration number to surveys@landcareresearch.co.nz and I'll sort the link for you. 🐝



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John Berry on Swarming



BY JOHN BERRY

Swarming is how hives reproduce, it has been an essential part of bees lives for millennia. It is, however, not an essential part of beekeeping.

It used to be. Back in the days of skep keeping, hives were expected to swarm, preferably multiple times, with the primary swarm being followed by after swarms, headed by virgins.

I was prompted to write about swarming after spending several hours today chasing swarms. The first one was at a local school and upon receiving a phone call about it I agreed to come and take it away. This is my first one of the season and I almost forgot to ask a few important questions.

Can I get my ute to it? More importantly, how high up is it? How long has it been there?

How long it has been there is important. A fresh swarm is generally very placid and I generally don't use any protective gear (although I always have some handy). One that has been hanging in a tree for a week is likely to be far less friendly. It also pays to

check that it is actually a swarm and not a hive i.e. it has already moved into a wall cavity.

Later in the season a lot of "swarms" also turn up in holes in the ground and these are almost invariably wasps, although I have seen two hives living in old rabbit holes. So, you can reckon on about .001% of these calls being accurate.

Anyway, I did eventually ask all the questions and drove for about 20 minutes across town to find that, A. I couldn't get to it with my truck and B. it was six or seven meters up a tree where it was going to stay for the foreseeable future.

On the way home I got a phone call about a swarm just a couple of minutes from home in a retirement village and, as I already had the gear, I went to have a look. This one was low to the ground, but in a bush which makes it very difficult to get all the bees out. I snipped off a few branches and got most of the bees



Spot the difference... identical twins John Berry, left, and Peter Berry with some examples of when swarm prevention goes wrong.

into my swarm box, which is just a full depth box with gauze on the bottom for ventilation and a sack with lid to seal them in.

Because I couldn't get all the bees, I left it there with one corner of the sack turned back so they had an entrance, and popped back just before dark, flipped the lid on and took it home where I just opened up one corner again. They have two frames of foundation and I will leave them alone for three or four days. Any longer and they will make a mess of wild combs, but if you disturb them too soon they can abscond. Sometimes they do anyway. A frame of brood does help to hold them, but giving them nothing but foundation lessens any disease risk.

Disease isn't a big risk in swarms, but why take chances.

I have captured many swarms over the years. I once found a fresh swarm in a cardboard box, which I put onto straight foundation. That's all it got as it built up and it produced over 100 kg that year. In fact, it was such a good hive I use it for some breeding. Beautiful daughters that all swarmed.

Bees swarm to reproduce and the swarming urge is influenced by genetics, congestion, honey flow – or lack of it – and queen age. Personally, I have not found the second-year queens to be any worse than the first-year. In fact, if anything, they are slightly less inclined. If you only breed from two-year old queens that have never shown any tendency to swarm then you will get rid of a lot of your problems.

Get any hive congested enough in the spring and it will swarm. I can't prove it, but I strongly suspect that shifting hives for spring



Too late! A hatched swarm cell, meaning at least one virgin queen is likely now residing in this hive and the bee population greatly reduced.

pollination greatly reduces the urge to swarm. Maybe being shifted gives them the impression that they have swarmed.

I have found that, with good breeding and good practices, most swarming can be avoided, but the one thing that I've never fully got on top of is when there is a nectar dearth in November. In one

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area, particularly where there was a lot of broom pollen available, hives would raise cells, despite having plenty of room and sometimes very little honey. If they succeeded in swarming they would then throw off after swarms and you end up with a handful of queenless bees just as the main flow kicked in. As soon as any sort of honey flow started the swarming urge would disappear and some hives will even tear down swarm cells.

This dearth swarming is almost like absconding behaviour where the bees leave for greener pastures.

I knew some old-time beekeepers that controlled swarming by lifting the hive up and dropping it from a height sufficient to dislodge all the queen larvae. Not something I recommend, but it does show the importance of being gentle with your queen cells.

Early in the season the easiest thing is to squash all the cells (they can hide them in all sorts of places and more than 30 in a hive is not that unusual) and then swap the hive position with a weak hive. If this is swarming just caused by congestion, then breaking up the brood nest with alternate frames of foundation and lifting three to five frames of brood above the excluder, combined with squashing all the cells, will often work.

Dearth swarming is harder to control and you need to recheck them every seven or eight days. Remove frames of sealed brood if possible.

I initially check for swarming by splitting the two brood boxes and looking for swarm cells underneath. It's not 100%, but you will find most swarming hives this way. If one hive is swarming then

most likely a lot of other hives in the apiary will be as well.

When hives swarm I suspect the queen attracts a lot of the field bees in the vicinity and, where swarming is bad enough, even those hives that don't swarm tend to lose most of their bees and this seems like a logical answer.

Since varroa, swarming has been less of a problem simply because a lot of hives are just not up to it, but don't think I always get things right. Like every beekeeper, I make mistakes. I once turned up at an apiary where we were a bit slow putting boxes on and there were 11 swarms hanging in the neighbouring trees.

We had one year where multiple yards in one area dearth swarmed to the point of most of the hives being completely useless for the season.

I have also seen one apiary where we used to leave a pallet of supers because of the difficult access in the spring and they had such a wonderful spring that some of them swarmed early into those boxes. You couldn't see which hives they had come from and most of the boxes in the stack were full of honey.

My advice... Try to stop them. Don't breed from them. Requeen them. A lot will supersede shortly after swarming anyway. And...

Don't eat the royal jelly and grub from these wild swarm cells or you might end up with four boys, like me.

John Berry is a retired commercial beekeeper from the Hawke's Bay, having obtained his first hive in 1966, before working for family business Arataki Honey and then as owner of Berry Bees. He now keeps "20-something" hives. 🐝



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A Mite-y Problem



The varroa mite, has been a thorn in the side of beekeepers (and a literal thorn, or worse, in the side of their bees) for more than seven decades, and coming up a quarter century in New Zealand. Ahead of an upcoming series on breeding bees for varroa sensitive hygiene (VSH), science writer Dave Black summarises where we've got to in breeding for varroa resistance, and why.

BY DAVE BLACK

It's been 72 years since varroa mites managed to find a way of living with honey bees. By way of some random milestones you're probably familiar with, varroa (the Korean 'flavour' that predominates) started to make its way across Europe from its Asia-Pacific origins in the 1960s, reaching Bulgaria in 1972 and Germany in 1977. Only a little later, a slightly different model left Japan in 1971 for Paraguay, arriving in Florida in 1987 and meeting the Korean type coming the other way from Europe, in North America! Having encircled the globe, they set about filling the gaps, reaching New Zealand in 2000, and Australia in 2022. Now what?

IT'S PERSONAL, NOT.

Varroa was identified in Britain in 1992¹, the year before I started beekeeping there, and in 1996 I went to my first 'international'

conference in Cardiff, Wales, – "Fight the Mite!²". I remember at the time thinking, well, we must have learnt something from the 25 years it had been in Europe. Now, 70-odd years after the original host shift and 12 years after New Zealand's own "Combat Varroa!" workshop (I was there too!³), I still wonder how little we know.

I don't write much about varroa, it would be a full-time effort if I did. The truth is, I resent every minute spent on the subject, all at the expense of the bees I am interested in. I have known too many beekeepers that know more about managing mites than they know about managing their bees. It's true arachnids are fascinating in their own right, and this one is a complex beast indeed. As an exercise in parasitology, it's an almost unrivalled case study involving an unusual and undeniably successful relationship with a viral disease, one of only four such diseases ever known⁴.



The varroa mite's nutritional demand is high and, while in a phoretic or 'dispersal' state, they will regularly feed on the honey bee's fat bodies.

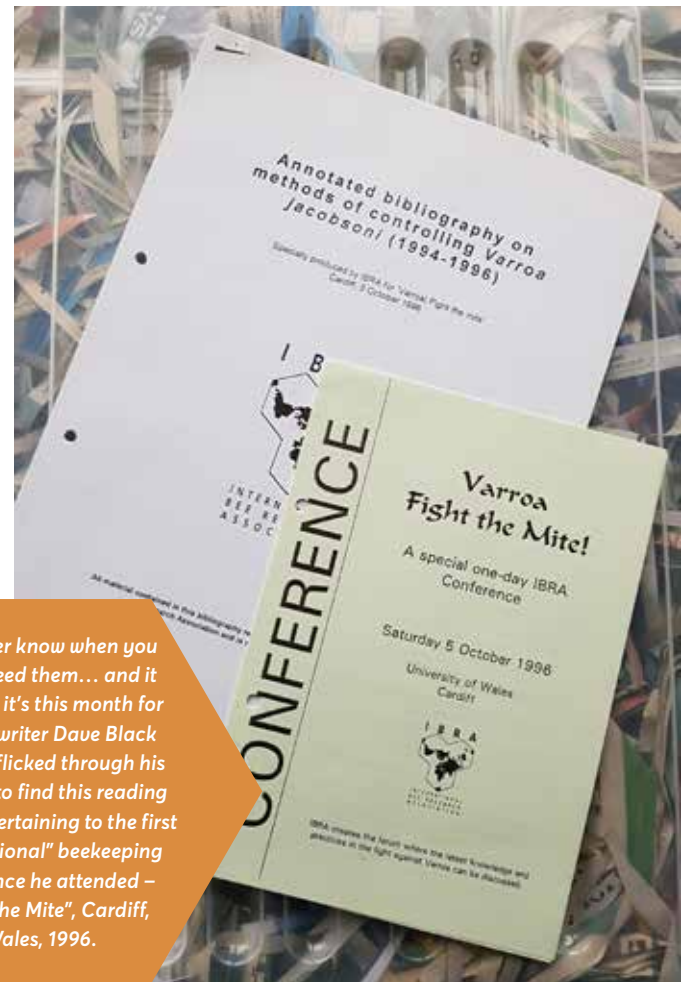
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN UNKNOWN...

It turns out four known varroa species parasitize honey bees, *V. destructor*, *V. jacobsoni*, *Varroa rindereri*, and *Varroa underwoodi*.

Modern genetic analysis has shown the two Korean and Japanese 'flavours' ('haplotypes' - variants of a parent's genetic identity) of *V. destructor* that went around the world are remarkably uniform, apparently near clones of the few individuals (probably counted in tens according to the geneticists) that made the jump from *A. cerana* originally. That many other haplotypes of varroa currently exist on *A. cerana* in SE Asia (at least 17 on *jacobsoni* and eight on *destructor*) leaves the possibility that more host jumps could occur in future.

When varroa are not reproducing they are what beekeepers have always referred to as 'phoretic', that is, being carried about by adult bees. This 'phoretic' phase is more correctly called 'dispersal', as they are not merely being carried around (true phoresis), but are actually feeding too. Their nutritional demand is remarkably high. Unable to feed from a host, varroa start to die after six hours, half will die in 18 hours, almost all (95%) within 36 hours⁵. A rediscovered study by two German scientists from 1981 pointed out that varroa do not digest all the proteins they imbibe when feeding. Instead, these are used unaltered by the female and found in newly constructed eggs⁶, a phenomenon now confirmed as 'kelptocytosis'⁷ ('kepto' - theft). It is a remarkable metabolic economy, and partly explains both why these

You never know when you might need them... and it turns out it's this month for science writer Dave Black who has flicked through his archives to find this reading material pertaining to the first "international" beekeeping conference he attended - "Fight the Mite", Cardiff, Wales, 1996.



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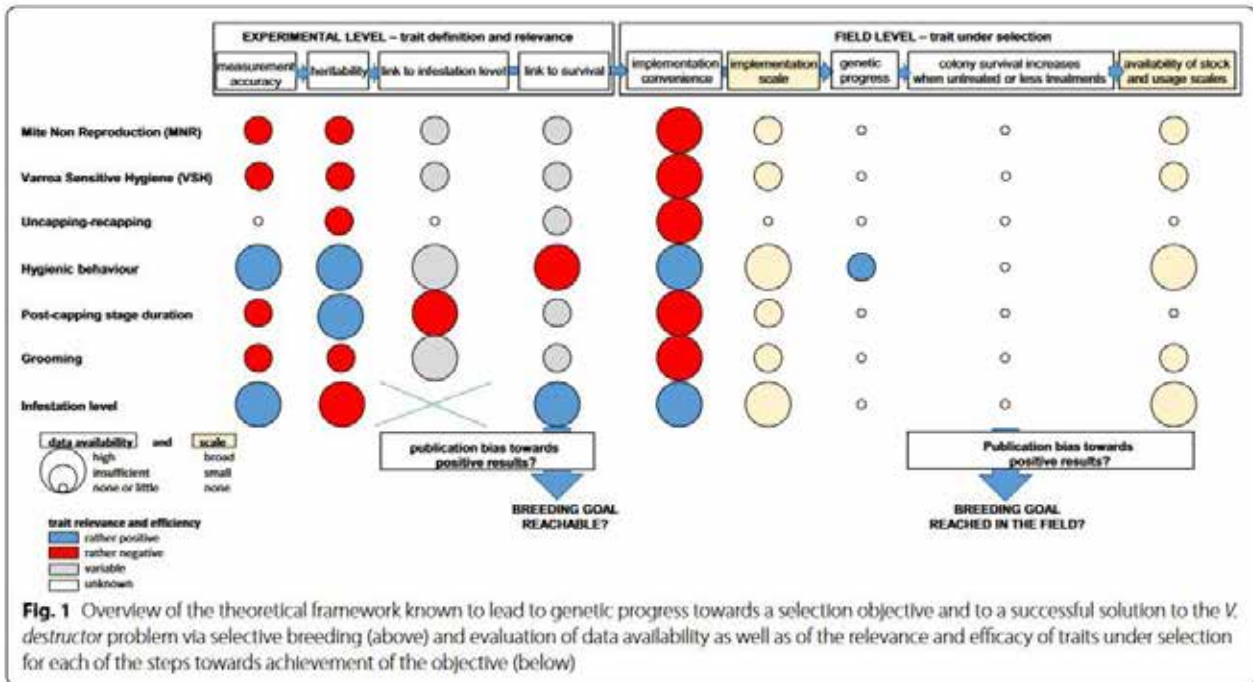
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mites must select the fat bodies of nurse bees at particular stages of their life cycle^{8,9}, and their rapid reproductive success.

Until recently little was known about what goes on during the dispersal phase. In 2022 Zachary Lamas in his PhD thesis 'Feeding behaviour and distribution of *Varroa destructor* on adult bees of '*Apis mellifera*' used two main techniques to study the matter. Lamas used microspheres (Fluospheres – commercially available, solid or porous coloured spherical particles with diameters of one micron that have various medical applications) to trace the transfer of material between mite and bee by injecting them into the body and watching where, and in who, they ended up. He also marked a lot of bees, as they emerged, with a system of coloured thorax dots that allowed him to tell their age and whether they had been parasitised by mites. Painstaking work, thousands of bees, many colonies, for months. Clearly varroa are promiscuous feeders, some individuals changing host almost daily while others used the same bee for 15 days. In the midst of a global pandemic there was never any doubt about the outcome, any viruses present would thrive.

VARROA VECTOR VIRUSES

When varroa arrived in New Zealand Deformed Wing Virus (DWV) had never been found here^{10,11,12}. The same was true in Britain, in 1992¹³. In Britain (and elsewhere) early tests linked colony deaths to mostly Acute Paralysis Virus (APV) and/or Kashmir Bee Virus (KBV), or maybe some combination of the few viruses known at the time. By the mid-1990s the role of DWV in the collapse of colonies was becoming quite clear. In the last 50 years DWV, once virtually unknown, has become the most widespread, viral insect pathogen in the world.

During this time it has never been possible to stop varroa infesting hives, so beekeepers needed to find ways to destroy the mites without harming their bees. The treatment and techniques available are mostly ones repurposed from treating larger animals, and, as in larger animals, residues, resistance, and resourcing the work were, and remain, a problem. At the same time, seeing that some species and strains of honey bees aren't

vulnerable to varroa, it didn't seem unreasonable to try and select and breed stains of European honey bees that could resist or tolerate the infestation.

Thoughts, feelings or other input you'd like to share?

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A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE...

After 40 years of trying around the globe¹⁴ and, it has to be said, spasmodic and isolated gains, it's probably worth asking why breeding for varroa resistance is so difficult. To summarise 22 pages of (I think) impartial expert thought, the current issues seem to be (reviewed in Guichard et al¹⁵): we can't or don't measure accurately the traits we *think* contribute to better survival, don't understand the environmental conditions that result in them being used, wrongly generalise from untested observations about naturally surviving colonies, and can't consistently predict to what extent a trait can be inherited.

As well, understanding the trade-offs that might be likely and scaling the solution to use in the field hasn't been tried. The collaborative infrastructure that might make that possible doesn't exist and there are no national funding schemes that might support a Genetic Improvement Programme, let's say, for up to a decade. The Catch-22 is that, to be successful, trials tend to be specific, local, and time-limited, which means the results aren't necessarily replicable and comparable to anywhere else. If I was to put it provocatively, not a wild goose chase, more wild geese chases. The question is, what do we do about it?

Dave Black is a commercial-beekeeper-turned-hobbyist, now retired. He is a regular science writer providing commentary on "what the books don't tell you", via his Substack Beyond Bee Books, to which you can subscribe [here](#).

References – available in the online version of the story, [here](#). 🐝

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Good Vibes



Enthusiasm is contagious.

Something is catching, but what exactly?

The world works in frequencies or vibrations, and like a tuning fork – they can resonate, where one will take on the same tone as another, just by being in proximity.

Enthusiasm as an energy must be a bit like that, as I have inspired my Dad and re-ignited his passion and strong love of the bees. The bees themselves are mirroring this and they are looking phenomenal, a mast year if you will. Beekeeping management has been on point this year, hive losses have been few, and impeccable timing with mite control in our remote sites earlier in the season has given us respite from re-invasion – up until the bees are made transient in pollination.

Obviously, the bees work with frequency and vibration too. A happy hive can be measured at around 200-400 hertz. A distressed hive raises its frequency to over 500 hertz.

Every living creature operates with a level of vibration. Harmonious tones resonate and create growth whereas incompatible frequencies at the right amplitude, even in humans, can be lethal. I started to wonder about varroa mites having their own energy signal... low and behold Google tells me that other people had thought of that long before I did. In fact there are devices that pulse a range of square wave frequencies which are apparently kryptonite to varroa.



Aimz doing some queen spotting with her kids.



Keen as – Aimz's girls are regular visitors to the apiary site.

Look it up if you are interested. Not being an instant solution or total knockdown, more another weapon in the arsenal. But the idea makes sense to me, and I believe there is scope to expand on the concept. Kiwis are a clever bunch – maybe someone reading this will have a lightbulb moment.

Life, and the energy that drives it, really is an extraordinary thing.

In certain cultures low frequency sound waves and music bass were used to attract bees. It was found those low vibes would mimic the vibrations created by flowers as they release pollen. Have you ever heard of 'Drumming down a swarm'? Supposedly the drumming noise interferes with the in-flight drone of the queen bee and causes them all to come down. I had a flashback of beating on a pot when a swarm was flying to get them to land close by. It worked. Co-incidence or...? Truth may be stranger than fiction, as plants can also recognize the humming buzz of the bee, and scientists discovered flowers would make their nectar sweeter in response to the noise.

Enthusiasm... yea it is contagious alright!

Being up to my elbows in bees everyday is a highlight of my life. By the time I go to sleep I am already dreaming of getting back into a hive.

Days are busy. Grafting, putting out cells and spring mated queens, evening up brood in hives for pollination audit standards and we are now stripping honey from a lot of sites to keep them rearing for pollination – which is finally upon us. My driving skills are being put to the test, especially as I have adopted the Big truck for my training, an Isuzu N series 4WD beast. Pretty quickly I'm learning which orchards are better suited for a smaller ride!

The honey is flowing in and we have a couple of sites on the rewarewa, including our first at-home bee site backing onto the native. Honey boxes have started stacking up and my three girls are only too keen to accompany me down to the back paddock. My eldest daughter has fallen into a role as weekend beekeepers' helper, checking out the rest of the hives whilst exploring the countryside.

Everybody's busy, and we're moving into a period of growth.

Bees are absolutely engrossing and beekeeping is an art. Its about reading the hive and listening to the hunches, timing is everything. You could spend a lifetime with the bees, and you would never stop learning. They are good for the human soul. The frequency they emit is one of healing and I, like many others, am grateful to be a keeper of the hive.

Peace, Aimz. 🐝



Treaty Principles



BY IAN FLETCHER

The ACT party's policy is to promote a Bill (and referendum) on Treaty Principles, related to the Courts' ability to interpret The Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti. To keep the coalition together, National and NZ First (who both see this as unnecessary) have both agreed to hold their noses (politically) and support the Bill to a Select Committee, after which we all expect it will die.

What should we think?

ACT's proposals are seductive: their first principle would affirm the sovereignty of Parliament, and third would affirm the principle of equality before the law. The first is a fact; the later ought to be. Not a problem, really.

It's the second proposed principle that is controversial. It proposes that the Crown protect Māori rights as they were when the Treaty was signed, but goes on to say that those rights only differ from everyone else's rights if there is a specific law, or settlement to establish a differing arrangement. This appears to extinguish any concept of Māori sovereignty, and reaffirms the universal application of the first principle – so, Parliamentary supremacy as well as sovereignty.



It is the second of three 'Treaty Principals' which the ACT Party, fronted by leader David Seymour, is proposing to be amended that is most controversial and risks extinguishing the concept of Māori sovereignty, explains Ian Fletcher.

The real purpose of the second principle isn't aimed at Māori claims to sovereignty, but at the Courts. The idea that there were Treaty "principles" was introduced only in 1975 in the Legislation that set up the Waitangi Tribunal. The original Treaty – in either language – is an exchange of commitments, not principles.

Since then, the courts and the Tribunal have elaborated a set of principles, based on partnership, active protection of Māori interests, and redress for past and present wrongs (this list is drawn from the published Cabinet Paper on the ACT Bill). ACT's proposed second principle would limit the Courts' ability to derive or extend new Treaty principles. It's a battle of the principles.

Given that this Bill will die, why bother? Because this debate (it's no more than that) sets up an emotive, divisive issue for future elections. ACT's argument (set out in their Cabinet Paper) is that the Court and Tribunal-derived principles are used "to justify actions that many New Zealanders view as vague and contrary to democratic values (e.g. equal rights for all citizens), including co-governance in the delivery of public services and even ethnic quotas within public institutions."

In other words, this appeals to people to whom Crown-Māori relations seem hard to understand, or who feel powerless or left out. Politically, this is astute. The last (Labour) government made a hash of co-governance ideas by failing to explain themselves clearly enough. I wrote about the Three Waters proposals at the time, describing their governance proposals as "baroque". It wasn't a compliment.

What will happen? The Bill will die, but ACT's policy is clear; they have a strong platform that will separate them from all the other parties, and I suspect it will work well enough at the ballot box.

What about the other arguments swirling around? Debates about what transfer or sharing of sovereignty Māori considered they were agreeing in 1840 are theatre. We will never actually know, and it doesn't really alter the current settlement or the debate. However, I think it would be a pity if our shared recollection became a caricature, where noble Māori were ripped off by dastardly British. I wrote my thesis in New Zealand political



An artist's interpretation of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, February 6 1840.

history (covering a later period), but I do know that the history is profoundly complex on all sides, and it is still being uncovered. We should give the past room to breathe.

Sovereignty today is exercised by Parliament. The people elect the Parliament, and the Parliament elects the government. That's the 1996 MMP settlement. We can change it, but we need to start from the facts. Order is maintained by the Police and the courts. We have one currency, border system, tax system, local

government framework, health system (well, sort of), and so on. Notions of an alternative sovereignty are largely gestures. I'd compare it to the so-called independent foreign policy, which (as I've noted before) confuses opinion with capacity to act effectively. Everyone can have an opinion.

This leaves the Courts. Here we have a problem, and ACT has a point. I have had senior lawyers, senior public servants, politicians and business people all express concern about what they see as the legal adventurism of the Supreme Court. Rather than ACT's electoral grandstanding, or Shane Jones' recent attack on a single judge's alleged leftwing politics, we do need a serious conversation about the constitutional role of the courts. Regrettably, I see no one in public life with the mana to lead such a debate both respectfully and effectively. Once, when I took over responsibility for the UK's interaction with the World Trade Organisation system, my boss said "Don't let the lawyers near it, Ian, they'll ruin it". Same with the Treaty.

Ian Fletcher is a former head of New Zealand's security agency, the GCSB, chief executive of the UK Patents Office, free trade negotiator with the European Commission and biosecurity expert for the Queensland government. These days he is a commercial flower grower in the Wairarapa and consultant to the apiculture industry with NZ Beekeeping Inc. 🐝

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UMFHA Celebrates NZ Mānuka Honey Day



Monday November 4 will mark the second annual New Zealand Mānuka Honey Day, as promoted by the Unique Mānuka Factor Honey Association (UMFHA) and its members. Marketing manager Campbell Naish explains what they hope to achieve with the promotional concept, and how it can be supported.

BY CAMPBELL NAISH

On the inaugural NZ Mānuka Honey Day in 2023, 31 exporters announced to millions of online followers and markets worldwide that real mānuka honey can only be found in New Zealand. This year mānuka honey brands and exporters will be "Celebrating New Zealand's Unique Gift to Global Health," through social media, digital articles, websites and PR.

New Zealand Mānuka Honey Day aligns with early harvest in New Zealand and the transition to peak sales season in Northern Hemisphere markets. It is a prime time to highlight the origin and benefits of authentic mānuka honey to international distributors, retailers and their sales and marketing teams. In New Zealand it is an opportunity to communicate the major contribution beekeeping and honey exports make to communities around the country and the ambition to increase the value of the sector.

This year, Mānuka Honey Day provides the UMFHA the opportunity to build on the successful October launch of the Mānuka Mastery Training course for trade. Course participants are armed with helpful facts about the origins, science and health benefits of mānuka honey and UMF standards, which enables them to speak more confidently to consumers about this product.

This has been one of our most successful launches, with 2,000 business to business customers starting the course in October and more to be connected with the training – health professionals in particular – in November and through to the end of peak sales season in March.

As well as providing licence holders with Mānuka Honey Day collateral, UMFHA is focused on two audiences. USA dietitians and nutritionists are one target, continuing our mission to raise their understanding of the health benefits of mānuka honey. We are also reaching out to retail executives across the USA to continue raising their awareness of mānuka honey and build more interest in the category.

This year we are also using Chinese language campaigns to reach resident New Zealand Chinese as well as Chinese travellers to highlight the UMF™ quality mark that underpins the health properties of certified mānuka honey.

To get involved make your own posts or articles highlighting how amazing authentic mānuka honey from New Zealand's unique *Leptospermum scoparium* tree is and post to social media, to your website, and/or share with customers or your local media. Add the hashtag #UniqueManukaHoneyDay to your digital communications so others can find and share your messaging. 🐝

“Oh Sugar, Honey, Honey...”



Having sold up his commercial beekeeping business of “many” years, James Corson has headed north to “see what the rest of the world is doing”. He’s still dreaming of lakes of honey though, even as he winds along Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way on the back of a motorbike...

BY JAMES CORSON

In the late afternoon I rounded a corner on the Wild Atlantic Way, that magical road that follows the west coast of Ireland from north to south and south to north. The rain swept in from the Atlantic and the wind hit the bike with a force that had intensified to that of a hurricane over its 8000km journey north from the Caribbean. I paused to record the moment on my phone and dolefully remembered another biker I had met a few days previously commenting that the wind had been so strong it had ripped, gutted and shredded his tent in the blackness of the early morning.

In the failing light I found a warm café that was still making ‘all day breakfasts’, and a campsite of pods in the lee of a rocky outcrop above the high-water mark.

With a full belly and a dry bed, I hunkered down for the night, splitting the last can of Stella and dozing on the bunk to an Irish rebel song on the ‘buds. And somewhere in that wild stormy night on the west coast of Ireland I dreamt...

Of a lake of honey, turgid and golden, below a glacier high in the mountains and Barry Benson with his sunnies and lilo lip-sinking to Abba’s *Honey, Honey*, coming from a boom box on the shore...and there were rugged hills with a million beehives spewing forth amber goo that oozed down into the lake, and men in white suits trying to close the taps and ease the flow, but the day was warm and the bees were on a roll And the men were whispering ‘enough is enough’, but the bees wouldn’t listen.



Barry Benson, of Bee Movie fame, floats on a lake of honey in the dreams of retired beekeeper James Corson... dreams in which that figurative lake is drained...



A pod on the Atlantic Coast of Ireland, where a Kiwi beekeeper might lay their head, yet be unable to escape the worries befitting their honey industry.

The pod rattled and shook as a million pebbles from the beach pinged on the door.

And when I opened the door a man in a shiny suit walked in. He carried a can of Stella and a laptop and he popped the top and opened the lap and scrolled through a thousand spreadsheets of 60,000 tonnes of honey stagnating in sheds from Cape Reinga to Bluff.

And he scrolled on. And in a picture I was standing on a misty hilltop beneath a wood of gnarled and windswept Beech trees looking down on the village of my ancestors. The shiny suit smiled and said... “James, this is the land of your ancestors. It is green and pleasant and full of rain and imports 50,000 tonnes of honey a year. They have trucks and roads and factories making glass jars ... and 68,000,000 mouths to drain the amber lake beneath the glaciers...”

The shiny suit disappeared into the storm and I saw a throng of smiling white suited people watching a TV on the beach.... And there was Barry Benson on the big screen licking the last drips of amber honey from the pebbles of the empty lake bed.

And he was humming.

"Oh sugar, honey, honey ..." 🐝



Any further west and his feet would be wet. James Corson parks up his motorbike on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way.

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