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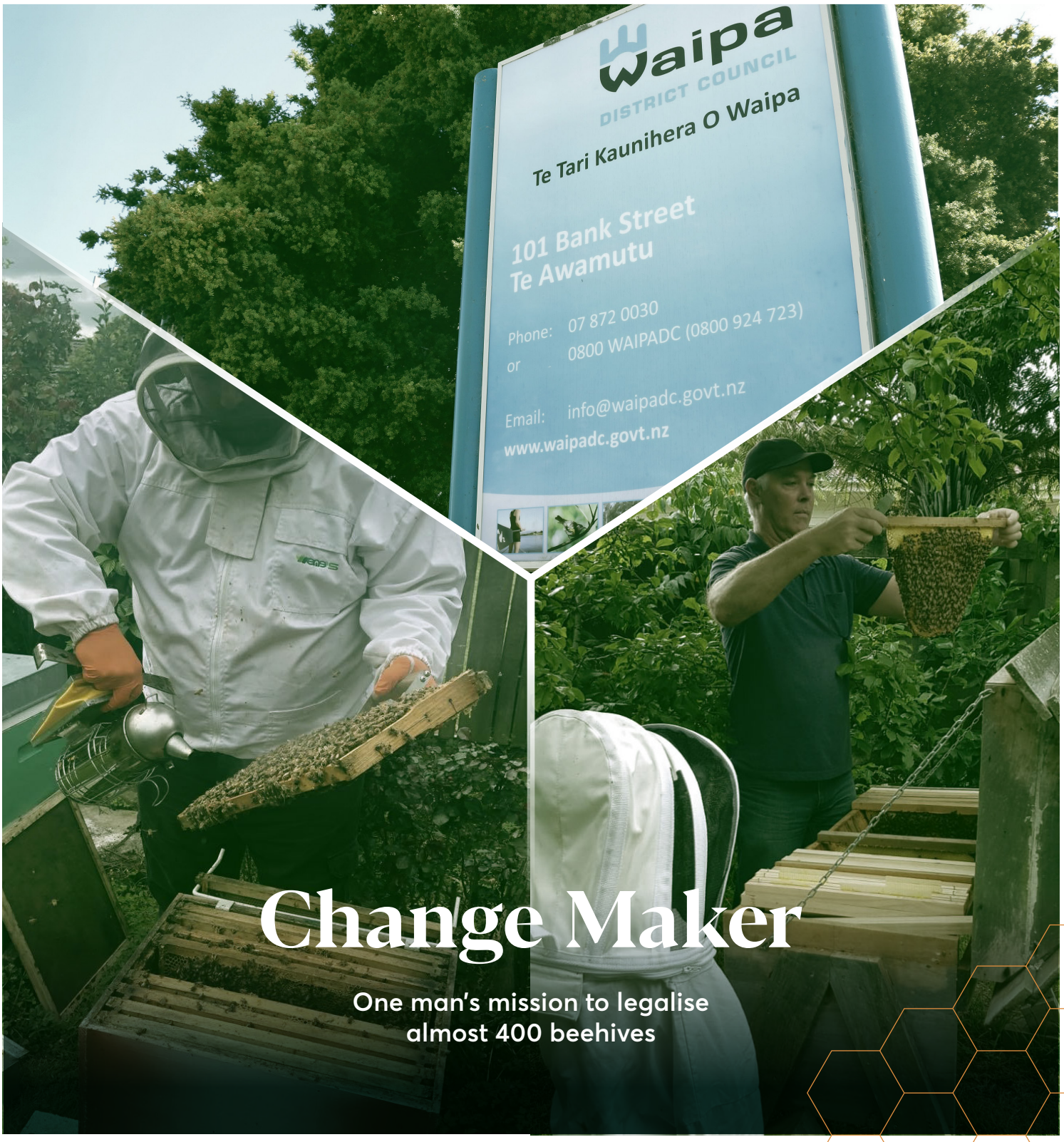
# Apiarist's Advocate

News, Views & Promotions – for Beekeepers – by Beekeepers




## Change Maker

One man's mission to legalise almost 400 beehives

# Change Maker

After stumbling across what he saw as draconian rules and regulations regarding beekeeping, Waikato hobby beekeeper and social justice advocate **PHIL EVANS** took on the Waipa District Council (WDC) in an attempt to bring about change. He details his 18-month journey to have the most restrictive and expensive beekeeping rules in the country removed, and how he won.

**In recent months *Apiarist's Advocate* has featured stories on the Selwyn District Council's plans to dictate to beekeepers a number of aspects for managing their hives. My story goes the other way – as one of overturning rules already in place.**

In 2014 the WDC introduced restrictive rules into their District Plan that required consent under the Resource Management Act (RMA) to keep bees on urban properties within their jurisdiction, primarily Cambridge and Te Awamutu. That followed a consultation process where 11 people made submissions, nine of whom called for the proposed rules to be altered to something more suited to beekeeping.

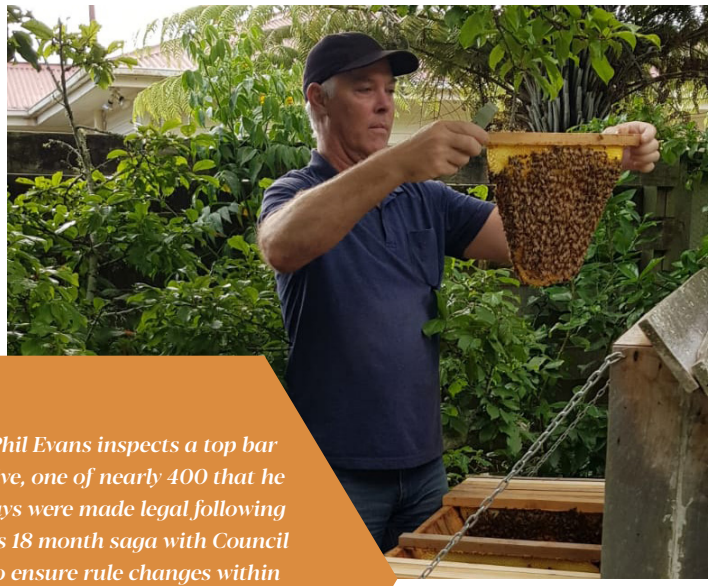
It won't surprise many to learn that the nine were ignored and weight given to the two against, even though both admitted they had no experience of the issues they were submitting on – swarming, and anaphylaxis.

The resulting rules were the most restrictive and expensive for any of New Zealand's 67 Councils and in 2017, when I was just beginning my beekeeping hobby, they came to my attention.

## SO IT BEGINS

A friend and I were discussing putting a hive on her property in Te Awamutu and, after some contact with WDC, we discovered the cost of this act would be a deposit of $1900 for a land use consent for a discretionary activity. We ended the idea of a hive on her property there!

Two years later, towards the end of 2019, I responded to a request, on a beekeeping forum from a Te Awamutu beekeeper, for assistance with navigating Council rules. He had had hives on his property for a number of years, and a prospective buyer of a neighbouring property had contacted WDC concerned about the hives up against his boundary fence. I accepted the challenge, being an advocate to challenging stupid rules put in place by government departments.



*Phil Evans inspects a top bar hive, one of nearly 400 that he says were made legal following his 18 month saga with Council to ensure rule changes within the Waipa District.*

As I investigated, I soon learnt that the beekeeping rules in WDC's District Plan were clearly not fit for purpose. The further I delved into the District Plan, and followed my colleague's attempt to unravel the Land Use Consent process, the more it became clear these rules had to change.

The irony of the situation was that there were just under 400 beehives on urban properties in both Te Awamutu and Cambridge and the consent application we were undertaking was the first since the rules were voted on back in 2014. For six years, not a single person had attempted to get a consent and the WDC had made no attempt to require anyone to apply, until the enquiry from this potential property buyer.

I won't go into the details of the consent application process, other than to say the beekeeping rules were in the same category as adding an extension to a retail shop or converting a building into a church. Beekeeping was point "m" in a list of 15 building related "discretionary activities". A lawyer was required to interpret how the building rules related to keeping two beehives.

I am sure you can see how ludicrous this all was.

At the time, we had no idea how many consents had been applied for, or granted, and assumed that all the hives in Waipa's two main towns were already consented. On discovery that this was the first consent application my blood began to boil and so began an 18-month long battle to get the rules removed from the District Plan.

## RESEARCH PHASE

I will admit my methods were possibly not the most diplomatic, but I was not going to allow a Council to maintain such restrictive rules. I started digging, and managed to locate the fragmented rules within a number of parts of the District Plan and also the 11 submissions made in 2012.

Tucked away in the Section 42a staff report (required under the RMA) was this…

4.10.1 *The reasons included within the submission are that requiring a resource consent for beehives in the Residential Zone will be damaging to beekeeping practices and will adversely affect pollination.*

4.10.3 *The reason why a rule relating to the keeping of bee hives in the Residential Zone has been added relates to the potential adverse effects from poorly positioned and maintained hives.*

4.10.1 showed they knew that the proposed rules would be damaging to beekeeping, and 4.10.3 shows they were far more concerned about prosecution than listening to beekeepers.

Informal discussions with the Council's enforcement officer led me to the understanding that, by holding beekeepers responsible under the RMA the council made available more efficient and effective range of tools, including abatement notices, infringement notices and enforcement orders.

In the end the nine submissions from beekeepers were ignored and the final report still pushed for the extremely restrictive rules voted on and approved by the Council in 2014.

## SEEKING CHANGE

I pushed very hard in my discussions with Council staff and, within a few weeks, managed to convince the policy manager to include the beekeeping rules on a list for proposed District Plan rule changes. That was milestone one and was significant. Getting anything changed within a District Plan is never easy and it can take years.

I kept following up, and providing every bit of info I could find to justify the rules being changed and it paid off. In early 2020, I was advised that my list was being put to a full Council meeting on March 3. I twice emailed all the Councillors, lobbying them to vote to review the rules. Crunch time came, and I sat attentively in the public gallery waiting for the beekeeping rules to come up for debate.

Any decision would not be to change the rules, but simply a vote to put them through the review process. The debate was lively, with two councillors opposing, as they had been in Council when the rules were put in place, and they saw nothing wrong with them. The vote was taken and milestone two – the beekeeping rules would be reviewed.

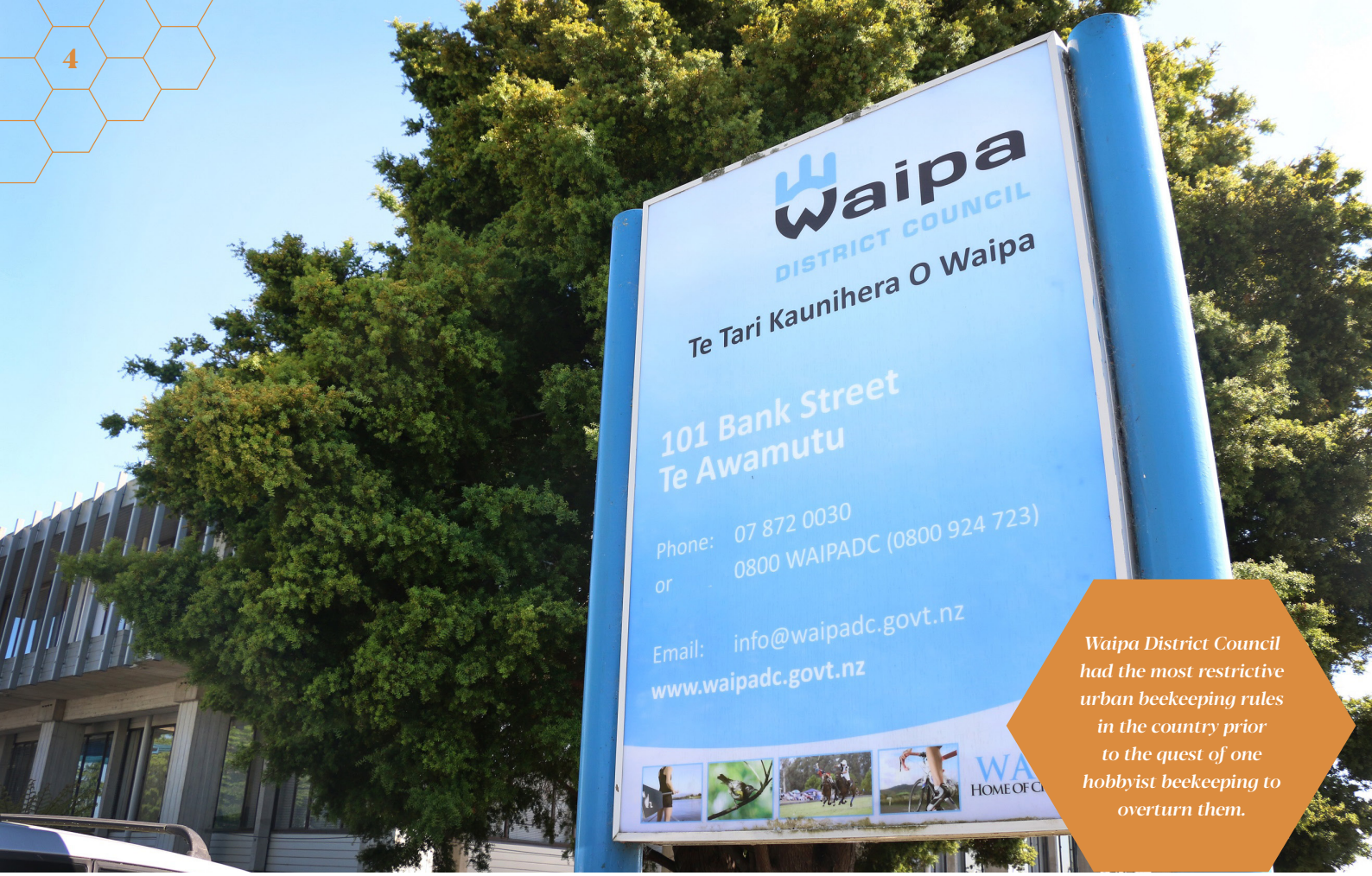
We were six months in and I had successfully convinced a Council to review District Plan rules.

Then Covid hit, and my elation of the past few weeks vanished. Lockdown meant almost everything would stop, and total uncertainty about what would happen. I was resigned to the reality that the process could literally take years.

## WINDS OF CHANGE

Then, eight months later, in October last year the gears of change began to turn once again. I received an email from the Council asking me to review the Section 32 report before it was put out for consultation. Four options were suggested:

1. Do nothing (which they deemed unviable).
2. Delete the rule and provide no replacement (noted as viable but not recommended).
3. Delete the rules and create a bylaw (again, viable but not recommended).
4. Retain the rule that permits bee hives with controls (noted as the preferred option).




*Waipa District Council had the most restrictive urban beekeeping rules in the country prior to the quest of one hobbyist beekeeping to overturn them.*

I favoured the third "viable but not recommended" option.

The revised rules were to keep the limit of only two hives in towns, with an expensive consent required if you want more, would ban hives adjacent to schools, public reserves or day care centres, plus require beekeepers to position hives three metres from a fence, or five metres from a building.

The 35-page document was mostly about the RMA processes for changing rules, but tucked into the justifications for the options were, once again, the priority of keeping the rules in the District Plan for ease of prosecution.

In my many emails to staff, I had made it very clear that there had never been any Council in New Zealand to have come even remotely close to prosecuting anyone for nuisance relating to bees. It was clear prosecution would be something that needed countering in submissions when they were called for.

I returned my comments about the proposals in the Section 32 report to WDC, and sat back and waited to see what would happen. Two months later, I was advised submissions would be called for during December and January. I found the supporting documents, and was very disappointed to see no changes at all.

It seemed that once again, comments by a beekeeper had been ignored.

## BEATING THE DRUM

Submissions were being called for though, so I set about drumming up support by encouraging as many beekeepers as possible to submit. There was very little feedback from three beekeeping forums and I had not heard a peep from my local bee club, so I was in the dark about how many there would be.

Here I was putting my heart and soul into making nearly 400 beehives legal, and I still felt I was on my own.

Submissions closed late January 2021 and about a week later I was advised there were 16 submissions. Only 16 … just five more that last time. I had expected a lot more.

Of those 16, two were in favour of leaving rules as they were. Fourteen others mostly agreed the rules needed removing and that a bylaw was needed regarding nuisance, following most other Councils' lead. I was hoping that this would push the WDC to realise their proposed option four (retention of existing rules) was not acceptable.

## THE HEARING

I had asked to speak to my submission and a few weeks later that date was set, March 29, 2021. This was the last opportunity for submitters to have their say and of the 16 submitters only two were planned to speak, myself and another representing the Waikato Bee Club.

A key happening occurred before the hearing, with the panel and staff taken to Te Awamutu Primary School by renowned apiculture scientist Dr Mark Goodwin to see first-hand the beehives on school grounds, managed by the students. One of the new rules was to ban hives on properties adjacent to schools. This visit showed them how 'not fit for purpose' that was.

At the hearing, I spoke first and outlined my reasons why each of the four proposed rules were still not fit for purpose, backing up what many others had said in their submissions. I called for a bylaw, like most other Councils had. The other submitter spoke, and the consent holder for the only legal beehives in Te Awamutu and Cambridge, who was present but had not intended to speak, was asked for his comments.

An adjournment followed, with the Chair advising he hoped they would soon make a decision. We were asked to return in 20 minutes, but after only five minutes of anxious waiting we were called back in.

"We have decided to accept option three and create a bylaw to manage any nuisance," they stated. The three people speaking to our submissions were asked to consult on the preparation of the new bylaw before it goes out for consultation.

I had won. We had won. Beekeeping had won.

Almost 18 months to the day after the fight had begun, I had taken on a Council and succeeded. At that moment, nearly 400 beehives were legalised. Here I was, a hobby beekeeper, not even a resident of Waipa District Council, who had overturned the rules.

## CHANGE CAN HAPPEN

This proves that change can happen, but there has to be a strong voice. There is a lot of complacency among beekeepers, and many probably don't know what rules apply in their areas. Councils are rife with a lack of knowledge and experience which means it is vital that bee clubs and experienced beekeepers keep up with local governing rules.

Apiculture New Zealand also needs to step up and make submissions to any Council that proposes rules that are unfair and unreasonable.

WDC did the right thing on March 29. All Councils around the country, including Selwyn District Council, should take note, but it is up to beekeepers to educate them and help them see sense.

Bees are not the serious nuisance some Councils and many people perceive. Most issues can usually be resolved with a discussion between neighbours, and a jar of liquid gold often helps sweeten them up.

*Prior to the efforts of Phil Evans, Morgan Samuel's two colourful hives were the only legally registered beehives in Cambridge and Te Awamutu, now they are joined by hundreds of others.*

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# What's Wrong with Teaching Beekeeping Online?

Following on from *Apiarist's Advocate's* story last month, *Fees Free Failings*, which highlighted deficiencies in beekeeper training since the introduction of a "fees-free" model in May 2020, major concerns have been raised as to the suitability of one entirely online training course. Numerous students of Southland Institute of Technology's (SIT) level 3 Certificate in Apiculture have raised complaints, direct to this publication, the course provider and publicly through Facebook. Nelson beekeeper **NIGEL COSTLEY** investigates some of those complaints here, while also providing his thoughts as an experienced apiculture tutor.

**In these Covid-afflicted times studying online has proved a blessing, for many a necessity. For the rest of us, Zooming is a marvelous way to conduct seminars and discussion. Online beekeeper training offers learning at your own pace, without being tied into a strict schedule of field days. It's a seductive option. So why is it that SIT's online level 3 beekeeping course seems beset by so many problems?**

At the moment, of the original 39 students who enrolled only 13, one third, are on track to pass, whereas a usual pass rate would be in the range of 70 to 80 percent. Further to that, aggrieved students have formed their own Facebook support group to air their complaints – complaints too numerous, repeated, and detailed to be dismissed as the usual snags and grizzles.

Among the grievances commonly repeated by current or former students are, a disjointed or disorganised course, very limited communication with or access to tutors, no opportunity for quality group discussion and – perhaps most concerning to the wider industry – repeated doubts that many of those who were deemed "qualified" following the course would not be able to adequately identify and react to disease in beehives.

To begin, what is the purpose of training? In my view, the first goal is to instill enough apiary skills so that the student has a fighting chance to keep their bees alive and productive into the future. To achieve this, hands-on experiences in the hives, combined with the benefits of a collaborative classroom is essential to instilling the required apiary skills, in my experience.

## HANDS ON HIVE TOOLS

Bearing in mind that most level 3 students have little or no experience, masses of hands-on bee handling is required. Theory is important, obviously, but only to the extent that explains and supports what you do in the apiary. This brings us to the virtue of the apiary-based courses.

For the last 10 years I've run level 3 courses at Wakefield and Pelorus in Nelson and Marlborough. These courses time-table 16 to 20 field days, beginning in late winter with hive making, running through to mid-Autumn when you close down for winter.

A typical field day would involve two apiary sessions in hives are adjacent to the classroom, with the aim to tie up the theory closely with the practice, and to tackle the topic just before it comes up on the seasonal calendar.

Knocking a beginner beekeeper into apiary-ready shape takes time, even for the most capable student. There's a 101 things to learn: health and safety briefings, handling protective kit, managing the smoker, and carefully following instructions.

Practical sessions mostly take the form of the tutor demonstrating a task, to be emulated by the student. Do they get this right first time? No. I've never had a student complete a full American foulbrood (AFB) inspection perfectly first up. Invariably they miss a step or get something back-to-front. No biggie. A quick discussion and next time it's better. By the end of a season's practice when you come to assess them on this vital skill you can be confident they're AFB prepped.

The best way to build up competence in the apiary is to get the students working in pairs – ideally a complete beginner with someone with a bit of experience, and that leads me to another key attribute of a successful training course.

*Nigel Costley. The experienced Nelson beekeeping tutor has investigated complaints from students of an online apiculture training course, finding many deficiencies.*

## LEARNING TOGETHER

If my teaching experience has taught me anything, it is the importance of the group dynamic. So, every class began by going around the group asking what beekeeping they'd done since last time. Every class has a few super-keen, go-getter students who go way beyond the course requirements – bringing to the class stories of catching swarms, trialling different methods, and working with other beekeepers.

For the less adventurous students these stories are a powerful stimulus to get over their fears and have a go. You can see them sit up and take notice. The super-keen students can be the tutor's best asset.

We learn best as social animals. The importance of collaboration should be stressed repeatedly throughout the course. I encourage students to work in pairs to shift their hives from the teaching apiary to their place and also during harvesting of honey. In this way good 'buddying up' practice often carries on beyond the course.

Despite its reputation as a solitary pursuit, beekeeping, for many people, progresses best when working in partnership with reliable allies.

## IN CONTRAST

Contrast this with online training, such as that offered by SIT, where demonstration is by way of video and assessment is by videoing yourself performing a specific apiary task. There is no interaction with the tutor as a group – the communication is one-to-one.

Perhaps realising their short-comings, SIT changed their recruitment to target those with bees already and brought in 'blended learning' which involves some physical field days. It is unclear how many of their students this pertains to.

*Apiarist's Advocate* has alerted SIT to the many complaints of former and current students and SIT has provided some general information pertaining to their apiculture training, but declined to comment on the specific complaints. They cite their internal complaints system as sufficient to remedy concerns.

However, at least two of the students say they have submitted formal complaints and both feel they were brushed aside.

## COMPLAINTS ROLLING IN

The complaints are too numerous and complex to list here, but we can provide a few indicative examples.

Communication from the tutors has been reported as poor. There are many examples of students querying their tutor and getting little or no response. One student, after sending 20 emails, says she eventually received one reply from their tutor which was "to look up Google".

Much of the material seemed badly prepared with students saying assessments were put online – then suddenly disappeared – only to emerge re-written.

Assessing disease inspection has been problematic according to the complainants, with one piece of correspondence appearing to

be an admission that the course's disease competence assessment through video was failing to achieve positive outcomes.

"After having marked the majority of the videos that have been submitted for this paper, we have decided that we don't have enough detail in the assessment or in the course material provided to date to prove that you can carry out a disease inspection as required to achieve the course outcome," the SIT tutor stated in the email.

SIT have defended their training by pointing out that students are required to have completed an AFB recognition course delivered by the national Management Agency to achieve the level 3 qualification.

Also proving problematic has been the course provider's request for students to tune into the local beekeeping scene for practical experience, such as a honey house visit, without SIT having established any relationships with such facilities in many, if any, regions.

There will be some areas that have bee clubs and helpful neighbors, but there will be plenty of places that don't. And what of those areas where there is already an over-supply of beekeepers and fierce competition for apiary sites? You can hardly expect the new beekeeper, especially if they have commercial ambitions, to be embraced by the old hands. Even if the student was able to co-op some good local resources it would be on an unreliable, hit-and-miss basis.

## IMPROVMENTS CAN BE MADE

The inadequacies of the SIT apiculture program detailed by its students, combined with the failings detailed in this publication last month, highlight problems in our beekeeper training such as over-dependence on technology and an inflated expectation of what a level 3 qualification means.

It would be unfair to lay too much blame on the SIT tutors. If any of the other courses were subject to this level of complaint and scrutiny, failings could be found.

The crux of the problem, I believe, is in planning courses and the failure to appreciate what technology does and doesn't do well. Digital technology can provide brilliant communication, but in the deceptively simple business of learning to handle bees, I think it a poor substitute for warm bodies.

We don't need to catastrophize the issue though. Improvements can be made – ditching fees free would be a good start. It's great for the providers in bumping up student numbers, but it is inherently bad for quality control. Would SIT have got away with its deficiencies had their students paid the usual $1200 fee? I doubt it.

For most beginners the level 3 apiary-based training is a good start. It certainly is nowhere near a full professional qualification, but if done properly it can be safely regarded as the first few rungs on the beekeeping ladder.

How sturdy those rungs are depends on the individual. If they run hard with what they've learned over several seasons – repeating those skills until they become second nature and broaden their experience – they will eventually deserve the title: 'qualified beekeeper'.

# Airborne Honey Handover

Recently at Airborne Honey, in Leeston, Canterbury, a BBQ with staff and some of the beekeeping fraternity took place, marking Peter Bray's milestones and tenacity over the last 40 years at the company. It also signified the passing of the baton from Bray to newly appointed chief executive, David Hawkey, who takes over under a new ownership group. Local beekeeper **MAGGIE JAMES** was among those attending and reports on the April 9 gathering.

**Speaking to those gathered, Bray noted it is incredibly positive that Airborne Honey, the oldest surviving New Zealand honey brand of which he is third generation family owner, is in good hands to continue to prosper as he goes from majority ownership to a 38 percent stake and a step away from day-to-day management.**

Kevin Powell of Kiwi Labels, who has supplied Airborne Honey for 25 years, presented the outgoing boss with artwork of two Airborne Honey labels used in that time.

The Airborne logo has always been a stylised bee and the blue and yellow bee was created by Peter Bray in 1983. It has stood the test of time, with the format of the new logo in 2021 following similar suit.

Hawkey was present at the gathering, meeting many of the beekeepers attending for the first time. The new chief executive has gone from the tourism industry to the helm of a 110 year-old honey company.

"For ten years I was involved in the primary natural tourism environment in the Queenstown and Fiordland areas," Hawkey explains.

"I was also involved in the setup of the International Antarctic Centre, Christchurch. I am interested in the combination of tourism, science, and marketing."

Hawkey holds a bachelor of science in zoology and an MBA in strategic management.

"Tourism is a major earner in foreign exchange and my skills are transferrable to an export oriented and domestic honey industry," he says.

He was inspired to join Airborne Honey due to his interest in the natural world, global food production and New Zealand's space within it, plus Airborne's respected legacy – which he plans to grow.

"We will be focusing on a strong presence in New Zealand and will develop export markets as the opportunity arises."

***Prior to the gathering, Bray sat down for an interview with Maggie James, for Apiarist's Advocate, featured on the following pages***

*L to R: Kevin Powell (Kiwi Labels) presents Airborne Honey logos artwork to Peter Bray, while looking on are Airborne's sales and marketing manager John Smart plus newly appointed chief executive David Hawkey.*

*The stylised Airborne honeybee logos which featured on the artwork presented to Peter Bray.*

# Exit Interview: Peter Bray

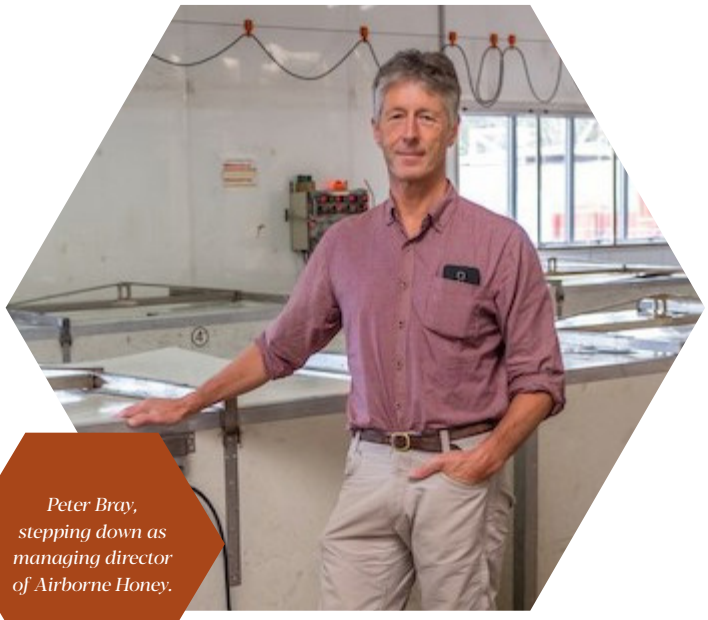
Peter Bray has handed over much of the responsibility for management of Airborne Honey to newly appointed chief executive David Hawkey as he takes a step back from the day-to-day running of the company. However, he has plenty of knowledge to impart, built up over 40 years at the helm of the business founded by his grandfather. He sat down with **MAGGIE JAMES** for a conversation on the business of beekeeping, honey and what his future holds.

**Maggie James:** *Outside of Airborne what are your plans for retirement?*
**Peter Bray:** My partner, Robyn and I are building a house at Tai Tapu on our 1.3 ha hill property. I have planted many natives and nectar bearing plants to attract birds and bees. We are getting a lot of pleasure from the large natural wildlife, including owls, pheasant, rabbits, and hares. The other day a kingfisher was happily flying inside the house.

**MJ:** *What is your future with ABH?*
**PB:** I am a director and shareholder. Quite simply, I will do whatever is needed to support Airborne – whether sourcing a part in the workshop or tracking a file on a PC.

**MJ:** *What do Ben (son) & Mika (daughter) think about your retirement? What will be their involvement in Airborne Honey?*
**PB:** Mika is working in the lab here at Airborne. Ben is out of the industry.
Both are pleased for me. They have seen my effort over time and the stressful ups and downs, not an easy road to hoe. There have been big changes. The biggest changes have been the crash of honey in the 1980s and the manuka phenomenon; and these have also been major issues for the industry.
In 1987 the world honey market collapsed. This was due to the United States Government Support Buy Back Scheme to their beekeepers constantly rising. At the time, in New Zealand hives were worth $150 each and the wholesale price of honey $1.90 per kg (probably today's equivalent of $4.90 per kg), the NZ honey market crashed to 70 cents per kg! This was the most stressful time of my career. Back then, Manuka honey was not a factor.

**MJ:** *In terms of planning the change in Airborne Honey management, was it obvious what needed to be maintained and pursued?*
**PB:** Yes, our technical ability adds value to our product, along with traceability, monitoring of pollen and heat damage. I have a natural affinity to science and application to keep up with trends. I collect data and statistics. Statistics can be used to reflect your gut feel; by supporting the gut feel with data. I have pursued



*Peter Bray, stepping down as managing director of Airborne Honey.*

testing and refinement of new evidence. I have been willing to change when my hypothesis does not step up with data proof. Not only can Airborne Honey adapt, but it can also adapt to others' inability.
The laboratory has grown and grown. This used to be an added cost, however whether it's clover or manuka honey being analysed, the sample needs to be validated, and these days this added cost increases value.

**MJ:** *With your presence in the industry for such a long time and prior to such strict compliance – do you think the amount of bureaucracy has been for the better or worse?*
**PB:** I can't say that it is better or worse.
Some of the bureaucracy is necessary and outside our control. We are a nation that produces food, competing in a world that produces cheap subsidised food. We must be able to sell our products, and we have to sell in markets where people want us to stop selling.
Europeans do not want to give up their heavily subsidised food supply. European governments push for their agriculture production to be more efficient, but their farms are small. Therefore, the European markets come up with a regulation and then NZ must come up with a way of competing.
If we want to export honey we need to keep up. If NZ doesn't have infrastructure i.e. bureaucracy, how can we meet those expectations? The same applies to dairy, beef and lamb.
We just have to adjust to MPI and the Animal Products Act decisions, along with decrees that have come out of various industries and intergovernmental agreements.
MPI pushing mandatory cost structures are not easy for beekeepers. Beekeepers need to make a living and if growth is slow, but steady, this aids the beekeeper. Unfortunately, manuka has been like putting rocket fuel in the mix, plus equipment suppliers are always trying to sell the latest and greatest.

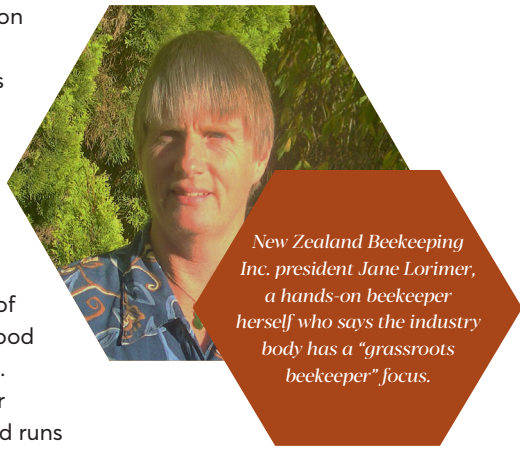
**MJ:** *Outside of digital technology, what types of technology have advanced ABH?*
**PB:** We have had a major emphasis on software. We were the first NZ honey company for customers scanning the Airborne Honey label QR code of their jar of honey. This automatically takes them to our webpage with information for that batch of honey, the map of NZ showing where the honey was produced, with approximations of all analytical data collected with that. Not so much in NZ, but in some countries, this is much appreciated.
On site we have a melting facility pioneered here at Airborne, with a patented process to get honey out of drums without heat damage; allowing superior product to be produced and packed. These days extraction plants have separate tanks for batching processes, aiding samples to represent a batch accurately. Otherwise, if the sample is taken just from the first drum, this is not reflective of all drums. Ideally, extraction plants have stirrers to homogenise. These stirrers are not expensive, and used with bigger holding tanks, batches can be larger amounts.

**End of Part One … Check back next month for part two of Maggie James' interview with Peter Bray, where Peter touches on the future of New Zealand beekeeping and the honey industry, glyphosate and AFB testing, plus our rules regarding tutin testing.**

# Representation from the Grassroots Up

New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) are acting in the best interests of beekeepers to ensure the best future for apiculture, and that's what drives their group, president Jane Lorimer says. She explains why the industry body, which represents "a few hundred" beekeepers, formed in 2016, the work they have done recently and the change they hope to effect going forward.

**Unhappy at the way some members of the beekeeping industry were being represented when the former National Beekeeping Association (NBA) transitioned to Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), those beekeepers untied to establish the Honeybee Society, initially, which soon morphed into NZBI. Five years on, Lorimer says they are playing an essential role in apiculture.**



*New Zealand Beekeeping Inc. president Jane Lorimer, a hands-on beekeeper herself who says the industry body has a "grassroots beekeeper" focus.*

"We foster an organisation that looks after the interests of our members and ensures that other organisations and Government do not impose restrictions on beekeepers that are unfair on the industry. As such, much of what we do is being a good watchdog," Lorimer says.

A hands-on beekeeper herself, Lorimer owns and runs Hillcrest Apiaries' approximately 1800 hives based just out of Hamilton. She has been involved in industry representation since 1997 with the NBA, of which she was awarded a life membership in 2007, having served as president of that industry body from 2002-07.

Lorimer believes in getting beekeepers views heard and acted upon.

"We work at trying to get input from our beekeeper members on what they would like to see done during the year. As we know, from past and present experience, a lot of beekeepers do not want to be involved in "politics" until it is something that affects them directly."

Lorimer describes NZBI's operating model as "lean and mean", with a management executive of six elected members, plus an adviser in Ian Fletcher who represents them in dealings with Government.

"Our member funds are primarily spent on higher representation at Government level through Ian. It is imperative that we keep him

employed, as his knowledge of the Industry and connections in Wellington assisting us to knock on the right doors with the right message is invaluable. NZ Beekeeping's reputation in Government circles is growing at a steady pace. This is because the work that we do is done with consistent policy and process – something that other Industry bodies are failing to do."

Lorimer cites the case of the controversy over changes to the Levy Order that ensures funding for the American Foulbrood (AFB) Pest Management Plan (which was extensively detailed in the May, June and August 2020 issues of *Apiarist's Advocate* available at www.apiaristsadvocate.com) as an example of their organisation delivering for the industry.

Another recent issue in which they have strived for improvement is in the area of biosecurity.

"We became aware that bee products were coming into the country via online purchases from various International websites. So, we acted on this and suggested that these big overseas websites should be made aware that certain things are illegal to be traded to certain countries and that the website developers should include an algorithm that alerts people to the illegal nature of purchasing the product," Lorimer says.

MPI has done little to address the importation issue. However, a tour of the International Mail Centre in Auckland by the NZBI executive has led to some improvements to the processing of incoming packages, which should reduce the likelihood of biosecurity breaches, Lorimer says.

Several key fronts on which their organisation should focus were raised at the latest NZBI annual general meeting.

Among them was ensuring the expertise of AsureQuality in the fields of AFB, exotic surveillance and export is retained now they are not working directly within the AFB Pest Management Plan. Questions have also been raised by NZBI members regarding the quality of governance on the AFB Management Agency Board.

"People with knowledge of the Industry and of the legislative requirements are needed on the Board to ensure the Management Agency's requirements are met," Lorimer says.

A Board where NZBI do have representation is the Manuka Honey Appellation Society and Lorimer says they will continue to represent Kiwi beekeepers there, in the pursuit of trademarking the term "manuka honey".

Another NZBI goal pertaining to honey is the establishment of a honey characterisation project that would enable New Zealand to meet Codex requirements.

"We are looking at collecting nectar from the bees' crop and analysing this to enable both monofloral and blend honey to be defined, to allow for marketing of product with a known percentage of nectars that make up the honey," Lorimer says.

There are numerous projects to work on which could benefit the industry and Lorimer believes beekeepers should sign up for an NZBI membership to support their work. The president says NZBI has a "grassroots beekeeper" focus in comparison to what she sees as a "top down" organisational approach from fellow industry body ApiNZ.

"As a member of NZ Beekeeping you get opportunities to become actively involved with shaping your Industry to ensure its sustainability for the future," the president says, adding, "without the grassroots beekeepers being looked after, there will be nothing to market or export."

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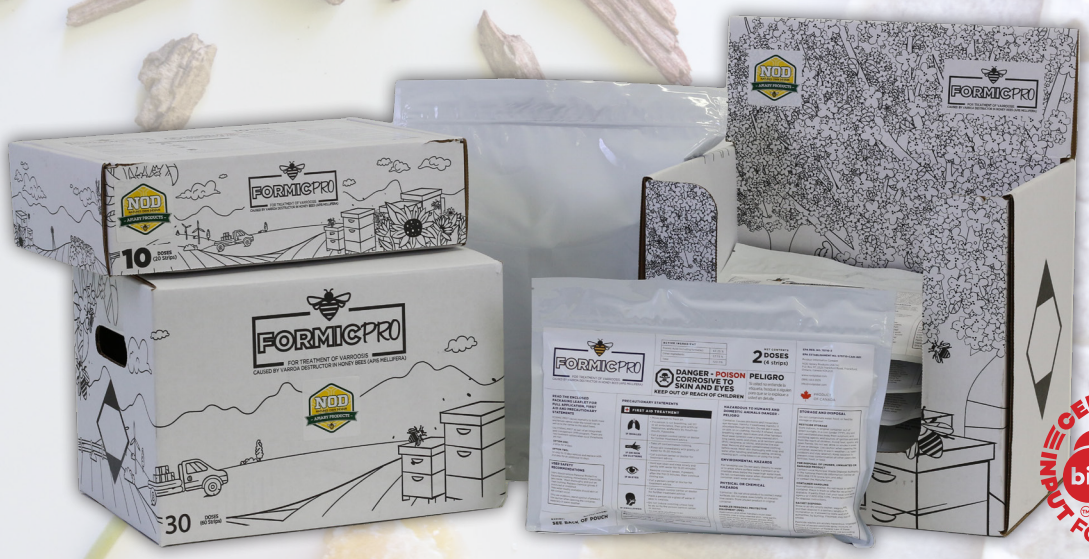


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# Maureen Conquer: Honey Sensory Analyst

BY CHRIS NORTHCOTT

Who is Maureen Conquer? Well imagine having taste buds so refined that you can recall and identify the exact apiary location that a honey came from, even if your two tastings of the produce were 20 years apart. That sort of skill means those who deal in the making and marketing of honey will care to know who Maureen Conquer is and the expert service she offers.

**One morning at a Clevedon, Auckland, farmers market, Conquer came across a beekeeper selling his potted honey. Upon sampling what was on offer, she stopped – she had tasted this very smooth, very dark, standout honey before. Quite a different batch.**

What was remarkable about this is that she had tasted honey like that only once before, 20 years ago. On enquiry she learned that the honey had come from the same sites near Port Waikato as what she had tasted two decades earlier. The current beekeeper had acquired the apiaries from a retiring beekeeper, which so happened to produce a unique and noteworthy honey blend that Maureen still recognized all those years later.

*Maureen Conquer puts her expert honey tasting skills to work at the ApiNZ Northen Hub honey show just after the August 2020 Auckland lockdown.*

## AUCKLAND TO ITALY AND BEYOND

Maureen Conquer is a professional honey taster, based in Auckland. Her interest in the profession grew from her hobby beekeeping when she discovered that the honey produced in her backyard tasted very different to that which was produced just a few minutes' drive down the road. This discovery sparked an interest which saw her shift from prior roles with food and wine tasting and into the honey industry – a shift which required training in Bologna, Italy, under the honey expert Dr Maria Lucia Piana.

The training has now been formalised into a course that Dr Piana developed, with input from Conquer. The course involves only four initial days of training, but it is only after six months of practice that one can apply to begin moving up the grades. The skills taught are longstanding even if rarely acquired – sensory analyses pre-date laboratory testing and were once the only way to verify the physical properties of food and drink.

Once one has attained a sufficient proficiency in describing and identifying honeys by smell and taste, they are added to the register of honey judges kept by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture.

Conquer recalls one test she was required to do where she was given nineteen different samples of common European honeys to try, with the idea that she would be expected to match them all on a second round of tasting, while blindfolded. Not being from Europe, only two of the honeys were familiar. It was a difficult learning experience, she says.

Since then, she has judged at honey contests around the world including in the UK, Ireland, Canada, Argentina, France, Australia and the Ukraine. This year she had plans to be in Russia as part of her honey judging role with Apimondia, but these had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tasting honey has become a passion. She seeks the opportunities to taste new honey varieties, judge at contests, as well as talk with other judges and compare notes. The occupation is not without its own health hazards. Diabetes is a very real risk when you judge sixty or more samples in a day and have to consume a quarter teaspoon from every sample.

Because of this, Maureen regularly self-monitors for diabetes to ensure she isn't consuming more honey than is good for her.

## HONEY SENSORY ANALYSIS REPORTS

As an independent honey judge Conquer also offers her service by providing honey sensory analysis reports. These reports describe the sense-detectable properties of the honey sample. The moisture content and colour reading are provided, as well as a number of physical assessments made by the well-trained senses of taste, touch, smell and sight … but not hearing – honey has no audible properties to speak of!

For a visual assessment, comments are provided noting the physical state of the sample honey together with the colour and aspect, the presence of any foam or impurities and anything else of note. Texture includes the consistency and the crystal description. Under the odour category as well as taste, the intensity is noted, together with a very brief description and notes on the presence or absence of fermentation, thymol, mould or smoke.

For the taste assessment glass tasting rods are used to sample the honey from – metal or wooden utensils can affect our perception of the honey, whereas glass imparts no taste.

For palette cleansing between samples Conquer likes to use a fine slice of crisp apple and water. A short description of the taste is given together with notes on the presence or absence of sweetness, saltiness, sourness, bitterness, and the intensity of the taste as well as the persistence of the taste on the tongue.

The report concludes with some final notes and is signed and dated ready for your records or for sending to potential clients.

The honey sensory analysis is another tool that can be used in conjunction with laboratory tests for marketing or for identifying similar batches across seasons to suit consumer preferences.

Some of the data, such as colour and moisture, can be collected with some simple equipment or lab tests, but Conquer's service is an independent report that verifies data and testifies numerous

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- ***A Sting in the Tale* yarns**

properties of honey for potential buyers. It also saves needing to send samples to buyers to see for themselves, who may not have the ability or the confidence to accurately determine the properties of the honey themselves.

Conquer's reports allow honey packers to identify and market the differences between batches or to blend batches to meet the expectations of the consumer or food manufacturer.

Consistency is imperative for food manufacturers and honey sensory analysis, built up through decades of experience tasting honeys from all over New Zealand and around the world, is an option that could prove itself a valuable tool for selling honey.

*Maureen Conquer operates the charity seed fund Wild Forage and can be contacted through* ***www.wildforage.co.nz***

# A Way Ahead for the Honey Industry?

**It is not news to beekeepers that the honey industry is currently at a low ebb, but expert honey taster Maureen Conquer thinks that honey producers and packers could learn a few things from the wine industry by focussing more on the region and the season in which specific batches of honey were produced.**

"Pinot Noir from Marlborough is not the same as Pinot Noir from Otago," Conquer explains.

Particular seasons produce an annual vintage and honey, like wine, may taste different in the 2020 season from the 2021 season.

Many consumers like what they eat to have a connection back to its source, so having a story or at least some data on when and where the honey came from will be a big bonus.

There was once a time when many New Zealanders were happy with cheap buckets of overheated golden sweetness, but as our hospitality culture has developed it has opened new opportunities to showcase what we can produce.

We can present thyme honey from Otago, viper's bugloss honey from Canterbury, kamahi from the West Coast, pohutukawa from the Bay of Islands and many other monofloral varieties from around the country. New Zealand beekeepers can offer a range of delicious honeys from our native and introduced flora to customers who want something distinctive.

There will always be a sizeable market for generic bush or pasture honey at a low price, but it is a lost opportunity when everything is just mixed together. It is good to give choice to customers, many of who are happy to pay a higher price for a premium product with a story and a point of difference. Advertising the region of the honey's origin is also a helpful way to market honey where the floral source cannot be specified, Conquer believes.

# Solar Savings at Hantz Honey House

BY MAGGIE JAMES

These days Hantz Honey is sporting a roof-mounted solar power installation comprising 94 panels on one of their honey house sheds, making it one of only several solar powered honey houses in the South Island.

**Situated at Lake Ellesmere, Mid Canterbury, Hantz Honey was established in 1944 and the now third-generation company holds over 4000 hives, undertaking pollination contracts, honey production, contract extraction and packing, plus queen bee sales.**

"Quite simply for us, the decision to go solar was a cheaper power account," says Barry Hantz.

"The decision to go fully solar in winter 2019 is one that is paying off. Our honey house, plus a family residence relies 100% on solar power. I estimate the in-house power savings conservatively at 30 to 40 percent, saving between $4000 to $5000 per annum.

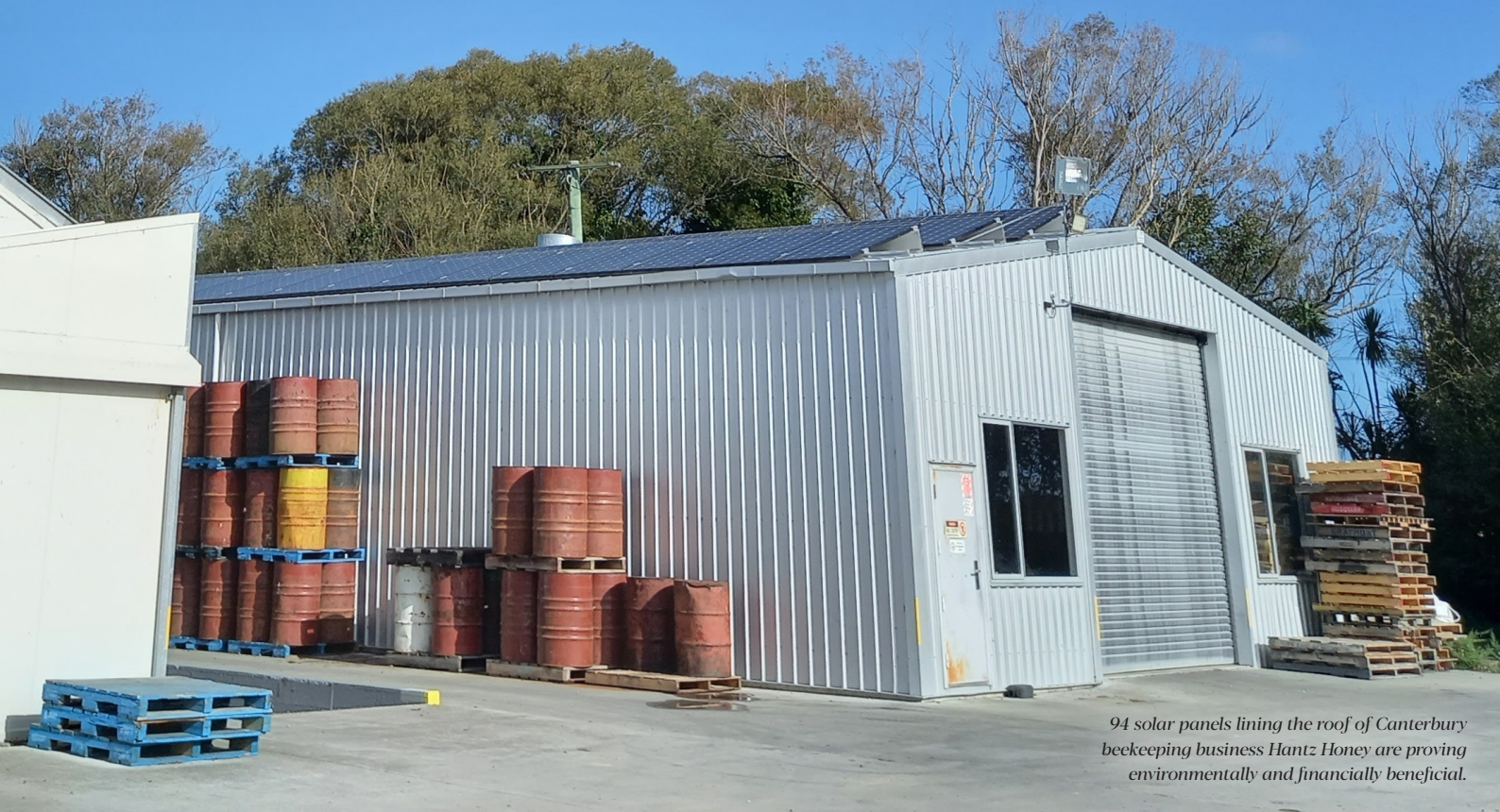
"Our biggest period of power use is January, during extraction plant operation, and that is where we have seen the biggest savings. Power bills have gone from about $2000 in January 2019, to $1100 in January of both 2020 and 2021, following the switch to solar."

Barry, whilst out on his usual Friday night socialising with other business people in the Ellesmere area, discovered some had switched to solar energy, at no cost to themselves plus also being able to purchase discounted power.

"The whole idea sounded like a no brainer", Hantz says.

Hantz Honey landed on a Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA) with local company Kea Energy.

"Under our PPA Hantz Honey bears no establishment cost, meaning all componentry is owned by the solar power company who also carried out installation. Observing similar comparisons locally, the concept usually costs approximately $40,000 to establish."



*94 solar panels lining the roof of Canterbury beekeeping business Hantz Honey are proving environmentally and financially beneficial.*

Hantz Honey do not own the hardware, nor did they have to pay for installation.

"It also means Hantz Honey is bound to a 10 year contract giving rights for the power company to have solar panels on the roof. The customer agrees to buy the solar power for 10 years at a discounted rate from a retailer," the third-generation beekeeper explains.

Kea energy, who have negotiated a power price with the lines company Orion, have become Hantz' retailer. Kea guarantee to be five to ten percent cheaper than other retailers. An invoice is created between Kea and Hantz' with the above savings.

Hantz Honey has remained connected to the national grid as a backup and they can buy from another retailer if they find a cheaper rate.

Energy from Kea takes priority over grid power, which has travelled great distances with large losses, and some of which is generated from coal.

While having the cost of hardware and installation removed was an attractive part of the deal, not having the bother of dealing with the Selwyn District Council to secure permits, or any difficulties with compliance codes and associated costs, was also a bonus, Hantz says.

Kea Energy attended to all of the compliance issues, along with a new power metre required for compliance. The solar installation appears to require next to no maintenance from Kea.

"The decision on which shed to install the roof mount panels was determined by the roof weight loading of shed and building specifications. The weight loading determines the number of solar panels to be installed.

"The current 94 panels could produce more power, but the limiting factor for Hantz' is that our transformer, on the roadside installed many decades ago at major cost by my father, has a power cap of 15 kilovolts, limiting our production back to the national grid. There are only two ways that this power cap can change, either for us to replace the transformer at massive cost to ourselves, or in the event of damage the local lines company Orion would replace at no cost. Unfortunately, the transformer still stands steadfast, despite numerous earthquakes."

Kea Energy, a local Ellesmere company, generates electricity by owning, operating and maintaining hydro-turbines and solar generating plants on dairy farms, petrol stations, vineyards, control gates and hospitality providers. They also have solar projects throughout the South Island, Cook Islands and Vanuatu.

Kea's customers are businesses only, due to the limitation of solar panels making residential installations uneconomic. Their electricity generation is approximately 30 percent of Christchurch and Canterbury lines company Orion's total exported embedded generation. All Kea's power is fed back to the main grid.

Data logging identifies the Hantz site energy usage and loads, giving an accurate picture of how much power Hantz Honey use, and at what times of day or night it is used.

For Hantz Honey the cost savings and reliability of the solar installation are very welcome, along with the extra bonus that Hantz' tick another box in their green company image.

# Beekeepers get a Day Out in Lincoln

**For many South Island beekeepers who might not be making the journey north for the national apiculture conference, and some who are, the Beekeepers' Day Out hosted by the Canterbury Hub of Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) on Sunday May 16 will be enticing. A wide range of guest speakers, along with a trade display, pack out the schedule for what is sure to be an informative day out as beekeeper conferences appear back on the calendar following the Covid disruptions of 2020.**

Lincoln University will play host to the event, a concept which the Canterbury Hub has been successfully running since 2017. However, last year saw the Beekeepers' Day Out cancelled due to Covid disruptions. All is on track for the 2021 event to go ahead as scheduled in a few weeks' time though.

Much of the programme has been rolled over from last year's cancelled event, with the theme of the day "Improving Bee Health and Sustainable Hive Production". That will see attendees given updates on industry happenings such as The Future Bees Project from Prof Peter Dearden and also the Canterbury Mite Monitoring project.

Financial matters pertaining to beekeeping will also be addressed, with Otago beekeeper and chartered accountant Russell Marsh addressing the issue of "Navigating the Financial Storm" while ApiNZ's senior policy analyst, Phil Edmonds, will give an update on the honey market.

From a scientific perspective Dr James Sainsbury is scheduled to speak on how colony handling and hive architecture influences pollination efficacy, while Landcare Research scientist Bob Brown will cross the road from his Lincoln lab to address biological controls for wasps.

From the American Foulbrood Management Agency Clifton King, the national compliance manager, is expected to provide an introductory presentation on the new Hive Hub website, while operations manager Marco Gonzalez will give an update on the Agency's work.

"It is a smaller version of Apiculture New Zealand's national conference to give our hub members and other beekeepers greater opportunity to attend something for a reasonable cost," Canterbury Hub committee member Carolyn McMahon explains.

The cost of attending is $65 for ApiNZ members, and $75 for non-members. In past years, attendees have travelled from across the South Island to attend Beekeepers' Day Outs which have been hosted in Geraldine, Blackball and most recently at Lincoln University in 2019.

While this year the conference has a bit more of a focus on commercial beekeeping activities than usual, McMahon says there is still plenty to interest hobbyist apiarists, and she invites all to register for the event through the Canterbury Hub website, www.apinzcanterbury.org.nz

# Embrace Science

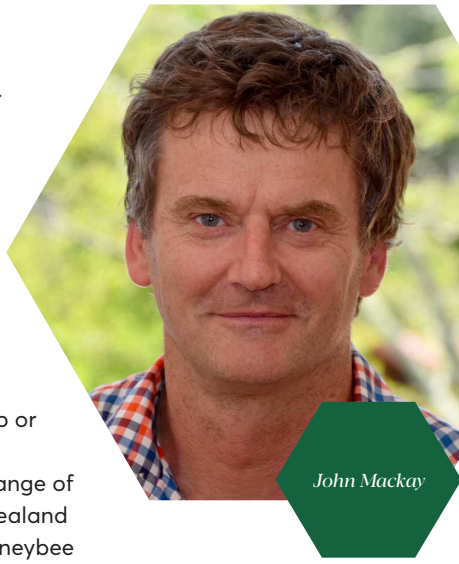
BY JOHN MACKAY

**"But I'm not a scientist" is the frequent claim of many beekeepers. Yet the trials and observations made of hives, with varying management practices to maximise honey production fit all the criteria.**

Despite the difficulties in obtaining research funding without industry co-funding, a wide amount of honeybee and honey product research is carried out in New Zealand. From the search for viruses that will specifically detect and kill AFB (bacteriophages), to the bacteria found on manuka plants, the effect of heavy metals on bees, new genetics to control varroa and wasps – the range of research is wide.

It's also directly applicable to improving bee health and improving financial returns – either by hoping to reduce input costs or increase crop yields.

Often the scientists' most difficult part is finding beekeepers willing to provide samples or allow observation of sampling of hives. They may be looking for beekeepers who have suffered a particular disease outbreak (AFB, nosemas) or those who have bees on certain crops (e.g. pesticide investigations). If you're interested in being part of these research projects then make your willingness known, whether it be to your local club or a national body.


John Mackay

For those interested in the range of research being done in New Zealand then check out the 2nd NZ Honeybee Research Symposium that will be taking place on the day before the Apiculture NZ conference **here**.

A program will be posted once presenters have been selected, but for last year's inaugural symposium, which was conducted on-line, there were approximately 70 scientists and beekeepers in attendance with representation and presentations across the industry bodies.

A thought to leave you with… Why is it called RE-search when we're looking for something new?

*John Mackay is the technical director at dnature and has a range of experience in applied science and molecular diagnostics spanning 25 years.*

# Cooperative Model Extracts Success

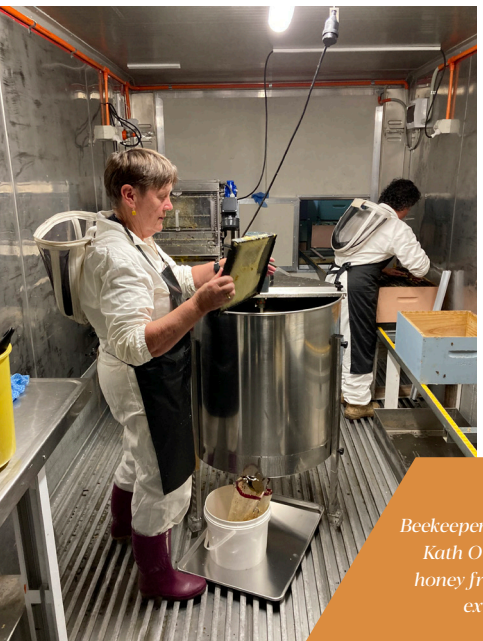
Beekeepers Hawke's Bay are showing what can be achieved with a little cooperation as they put the finishing touches on a new honey extraction facility which has been funded and assembled by many of their approximately 60 members. Now, they have an asset that provides not only a valued service to their beekeepers, but also helps add value to their honey.

**There is a feel of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker to the Hawke's Bay club's diverse, yet complimentary, group effort behind the establishment of the extraction facility in Bay View north of Napier.**

Housed inside a shipping container, the plant includes an uncapper machine, wax auger, three 150kg honey tanks, water heater, conveyer lines to move boxes with reduced physical exertion and an eight-frame vertical spinner which will soon be upgraded to an 18-frame horizontal. Adjoining the container is a 2.5m by 2.5m warm room which holds up to 60 honey boxes, which is about the daily output of the plant. It is all housed inside a former aeroplane hangar.

## PEOPLE POWER

The idea to invest in the facility was driven by three senior club members with complementary skill sets who, with a lot of determination and effort, have turned the idea for a club owned and operated honey extraction plant into a reality over the past six months.



*Beekeepers Hawke's Bay member Kath O' Halloran inspects a honey frame in the club's new extraction facility.*

Instrumental in establishing the facility has been David Hills, who keeps several hundred beehives plus has over 30 years accountancy experience and sound knowledge of cooperative business models. Over the past few months his hives have been a bit neglected as he has put considerable effort into getting the club facility up and running, which has paid off with several successful honey extraction runs now completed.

Club president Brian Cowper, a retiree with significant management experience, and renowned Hawke's Bay baker Graham Heaven, were the other members who helped kickstart the idea – initially loaning money to get the ball rolling.

"The three of us got together and said, 'let's get a couple of uncapping stations, an eight-frame extractor and do our own extracting'. Then we decided we were pissing around and needed some decent machinery," Hills says.

With that in mind, they have purchased an 18-frame horizontal Paradise spinner which will soon be installed.

"Brain looks at the legal side of things, myself the finances and Graham the machinery," Hills says.

The wide range of skills available among the club members has also helped ensure a cost-effective installation process, with the likes of an electrician, carpenter and food machinery technician among the members.

## SHOW ME THE MONEY

The cooperation and teamwork has not been limited to when they are on the tools though, with the real challenge that of raising enough funds to put together such a comprehensive plant.

The financial model is similar to that of a cooperative like Fonterra, but the best example is one many communities will know about, Hills says.

"We came up with an indenture scheme, basically the same as the local fishing club does with the boat ramp, where users put in $500 to $1000 and the club pays a modest interest rate. Then,

because the club is gathering money through usage fees, over time it can repay the money."

The club has agreed to pay members interest rates above those which banks are offering, making it a more attractive investment for anyone who happens to have some spare cash in the bank.

Members pay a usage fee of around $10 per box extracted, but will also be required to indenture a level of equity in the project which will match their use – similar to a shareholding in a cooperative such as Ravensdown or Fonterra. At the end of the year, users will then be paid a rebate based on their throughput, or that rebate will be held back if their "shareholding" is short of the required $4 per kg of honey extracted.

So far the financial model is proving a success and the money has rolled in, with about $50,000 indentured in short time, Hills says.

Over time, profits retained will be used to fund the repayment of debentures.

## MONEY FOR HONEY

The model doesn't just make financial sense from an investment perspective, but it is hoped club members will also be able to get higher returns for their honey.

Beekeepers Hawke's Bay packages and markets members' honey locally, gaining a premium price for what they consider is premium local produce.

"We can sell the members honey for about $8 per 500gm pot, which is the same as or a little higher than the supermarket price. We can get away with that because it is an artisan product, with providence, because they know the beekeeper," Hills says.

"We've been able to turn $4 per kilogram honey into $14 per kilogram, so $10 added value or about $120 per honey box."

## SUSTAINING EARLY MOMENTUM

While getting the facility established might be the hardest part, maintain it will have challenges in more ways than one.

A core group of club members will be tasked with operating the plant, while users will then help out with less specialised roles such as loading and unloading the warm room and helping with clean down. This will help reduce the risk of injury and the plant has been set up with safety in mind too.

Many club members are of advancing years and so the plant has been designed with minimal lifting of honey boxes required and a conveyor system between warm room and uncapper, then along the extraction line.

It's a smooth system and after several years in the idea stage, capped with six busy months making it happen, Hills is hopeful that the facility will be an asset for the club in years to come. However, he knows that it will only be of value as long as members can continue to cooperate to make the whole system work, in practice and on paper.

"As long as we can maintain a cooperative model and have a bit of fun, it will endure," he says, before adding some wisdom, "setting up the tea rooms is just as important as setting up the extracting plant."

# "Make the Chilli"

This month's *Supplied Insights* come from Ceracell Beekeeping Supplies director **BRUCE CLOW** who implores readers to focus on what really counts and help each other, advice that could benefit our relationships within beekeeping and in our wider goings-on.

**One positive aspect of our Covid situation is that it helps us focus on the important things. I lost my parents back in 2016 and it hurt. It still hurts. I think of all the times I could have shown how much I cared for them, but didn't, and now I carry regrets.**

I know people my age in particular are encountering painful times like that, as we all can at any stage of life. I expect some reading this little vignette will know someone in a difficult period in their lives, and wondering what to do. Is there something they can do to help...?

I read an interesting and poignant post on Facebook the other day. It was a story about two women who regularly went on walks with each other. The first woman, we'll call her Joan, had lost her husband a few months before and was just starting to gather herself together again. Joan's walking companion, we'll call her Mary.

As they were walking along in general conversation, Joan asked Mary what she had planned for dinner that evening. "Oh, my husband wants chilli for dinner, but I'd rather not. I think I'll make quiche." They walked on for a time in silence, and then Joan turned to Mary and said, "Make the chilli".

In the everyday moments, for people we care about, if you have an opportunity to do some little favour or service, then do it. You never know when you won't have another opportunity to say "I love you!".

So, what can you do to help? Make the chilli.

*Apiarist's Advocate* is brought to you by Patrick & Laura Dawkins, Marlborough beekeepers.
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