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APIARIST'S ADVOCATE

News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



A Honey Season Gone Sideways

Early promise of honey limited
by fickle January weather

Honey Season '25-26 – Early Potential Not Realised for Second Year Running



While some still hold out hope for a late-summer honey flow, other beekeepers are already turning to autumn tasks in their hives as various reports of a “patchy”, “unique” and “on/off” honey season are emerging. We speak to beekeepers up and down the country to get their ‘take’ on what is shaping as a below-average honey season which for the second year running promised much early before going cold.

As the calendar turned to February there was still honey to take off the hives and extract, but beekeepers have a general sense of the returns likely and the overriding mood is that a below average crop is likely for most, despite some hot weather pre-Christmas.

Cooler weather from late December into January, followed by disaster as a tropical storm ravaged areas in the top half of the North Island and brought days of rain further south, put a halt to nectar flows and has limited honey take.

In a land of microclimates and numerous honey varietals, from



Wet weather not only limited honey flows in January but saw this East Valley Honey truck stuck in the East Coast mud, a problem more suggestive of spring or winter conditions. Photo: Martin Crisp

both native and introduced species, there have definitely been winners and losers among those surveyed. No one is shouting of a booming year for production though, while some are resigned to low quantities. Contributing to that was a difficult spring over much of the country, resulting in some beekeepers struggling to replace over-winter losses and bring hives up to strength in time for honey flows.

The all-important mānuka crop seems to have fared better than most other varieties though, with some early flowering areas taking advantage of the early-summer heat before it dwindled. While little testing has been conducted at this stage, from the Wairarapa there are reports of low “quality”, i.e. ‘activity’ or DHA (dihydroxyacetone) which typically converts to MGO (methylglyoxal) to provide the honey’s antibacterial ability.

The cooler, wetter summer has limited pasture honey production, with very few reports of even average production of clover honey, be they North or South Island.

The quantity of various “bush” honeys this summer is hard to gauge. In some areas rewarewa – which can produce abundant nectar – has flowered well, such as lower down the North Island, whereas around the Bay of Plenty it appears to have been less consistent. Towai flowering was strong, as was kamahi across both South and North Island. However, it seems very little kamahi honey will have been produced due to the flowering coinciding with cooler weather.

Rata honey on the West Coast followed last summer’s booming year with a fizzer and little to no flower seen, which, when combined with the struggle for pasture flows, has seen the South Island’s beekeepers limited in their honey crop.

THE BIG GUYS

Some of the country’s biggest honey producers are putting their crops at “about average”.

Mānuka Health, owner of some 15,000 hives, national apiculture manager Brian McCall says despite an extremely challenging spring of cold and wet weather, “we will finish up about where we need to be, about average”.

“There have been no booming areas of production, but

consistency has been there. Everything is producing about the same thus far," McCall says.

Tweeddale's Honey, based out of Taihape, has a similar level of hive holding, placed across the central North Island.

"It's been generally an average year and certainly not good on the mānuka, average to below there, but bush honey seems to be average to good," owner Don Tweeddale says.

"With that heat wave we had in December they were pulling in rewarewa so quickly we could hardly get the boxes on the hives in time. That all finished and the mānuka came on with a big rush, a huge flowering. I have never seen a flowering like it. Through Christmas we had about 10 days of iffy weather though and by the time that cleared the mānuka flowering had almost finished.

"We got about a box out of it, but nothing to write home about."

Kintail Honey owner James Ward has hives spanning much of the North Island, with a focus on pasture honey, but some bush and mānuka also, and says they are expecting a down year – "if we get to average, I will be happy".

At Mānuka Orchard in the Bay of Plenty owner Logan Bowyer gains a good feel for the honey season as a contract honey extractor, followed by storage and selling. He believes there will be "way less bush honey" this season and that before Christmas they only carried out around 10% of the amount of extraction as the previous year.

"I believe the total take will be down, that's my gut feel. But there



The view through the windscreen of the Kaimai Range Honey Truck as they cart hives out of Northland, entering Kaeo and heading south on January 21 as the storm floods. Photo: Jody Mitchell.

is no hard data for our industry from last year or this to base it on, and that's a problem," Bowyer says.

NORTH ISLAND

The honey season proper starts in Northland, when the country's first mānuka flowers emerge and "those chasing early mānuka found it, but not in bounty," says Richard Kidd, owner of Marshwood Apiaries, based in Mangawhai between Auckland and Whangarei, but who contract extracts honey for many Northland beekeepers.

It has been downhill since that early promise though.

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"It started raining. The late-December bush and kānuka didn't appear at all. It looked like the January pasture crop would turn on, but it started raining again and hasn't really turned off," Kidd says.

As for mānuka "quality" in the region, that is down in many places according to fellow Northland beekeeper Liam Gavin, but there are still some pockets where "activity" in the early season crop is high.

The tropical storm hit Northland hard on January 18 and Gavin says he knows of one beekeeper who has had 150 nuc hives washed away. Kaimai Range Honey owners Jody and Ralph Mitchell had migrated hives from Bay of Plenty to Northland early in the summer and got "a box and a half of mānuka", before racing the weather out with their bees.

"We decided to load hives early and it was a good thing we did because the weather was chasing us. We got through to Kaio and the road was down to one lane and there were a few diversions. We got through to Wellsford about 10.30, 11 at night and stayed at a motel, set off again at 5am," Jody Mitchell says.

She says their bush crop has been good, with hives in Taranaki providing "not a lot, but some" rewarewa. In the Waikato, the clover has been "too lush" and the lack of heat stress has meant minimal nectar production for the beekeepers there, Mitchell says. "Good for cows, not good for bees."

Heading to the East Cape of the North Island, Wild Cape Manuka Honey owner Bill Savage says before Christmas they experienced "a quick but intense flowering where they could put on about a box a week". While mānuka flowering would typically last into January, this year it was over in late December, but by then two or three weeks of hot weather had been recorded.

"We will be above average, but not much above. Probably about 30kg a hive of mānuka, and then a bit of multi on top of that," Savage reports.

In Taupo Smokin Joe's Honey owner Wallace Steel says there was "zero" mānuka flowering on much of the Desert Road, but that improved by Waiouru.

"Through Whanganui looks like it has had a bunch of honey come in. Masterton had good flower and a good crop but no quality in it. It is a shame for those beekeepers because a lot of that is high cost, helicopter access," Steel says.

In the Wairarapa beekeeper and contract honey extractor Stu

Ferguson, of Hunter Reilly, corroborates that report.

"The first flow was ok but everything seems to be about 1000 to 1500 DHA lower than normal. That would be out to 50 to 100km around us. All really low on DHA," Ferguson says.

"I wish I knew why, but it is possibly due to overzealous kānuka flowering and the weather that came through at the peak of mānuka flowering. Even traditionally UMF20+ sites are down to 15+. So we have seen a real dive in quality and we saw the same thing last year."

Echoing much of the rest of the North Island, Ferguson says the amount of early mānuka was good, but from Christmas "our second flow on mānuka was a dead duck".

SOUTH ISLAND

In a year where pasture flows are hard to come by, and the rata doesn't flower on the West Coast, honey quantity out of the Mainland is likely to be down. However, there is still the more reliable beech honey dew to be gathered in the higher altitudes in the top half of the island to cap the honey season, plus optimism that the pasture flow might have something left in it late in the summer.

On the plains of Canterbury more than one beekeeper has been heard to say "we have done better than last season, but that isn't saying much at all," making for two down seasons in succession.

"The clover flower is looking good, but it is not really in the boxes... yet," says Whitestone Honey owner Shane Rawson from Oamaru.

Like in the North Island, some sites gathered a box of honey



As stormy weather hits Kaimai Range Honey hives are loaded out of Northland, having gathered "a box and a half" of mānuka honey each. Liam Morragh, left, and Ralph Mitchell. Photo: Jody Mitchell.

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early, but "when that switch turned off, it turned off hard," Rawson says.

"I have seen some places in Canterbury where they are eating into it."

At Hantz Honey in Leeston, Canterbury, owner Barry Hantz is hopeful they might reach average for the honey take, while growing demand for small-seed pollination hives boosts his business.

Heading to North Canterbury, Natural NZ Honey owner James Malcolm says "it's been painful since Christmas", but like the rest of New Zealand they did get honey before the weather went cold.

"We haven't had any failures yet, but there are some pockets which are 25kg/hive and some which are 45kg. It is more of the 25 than the 45 though unfortunately," Malcolm says.

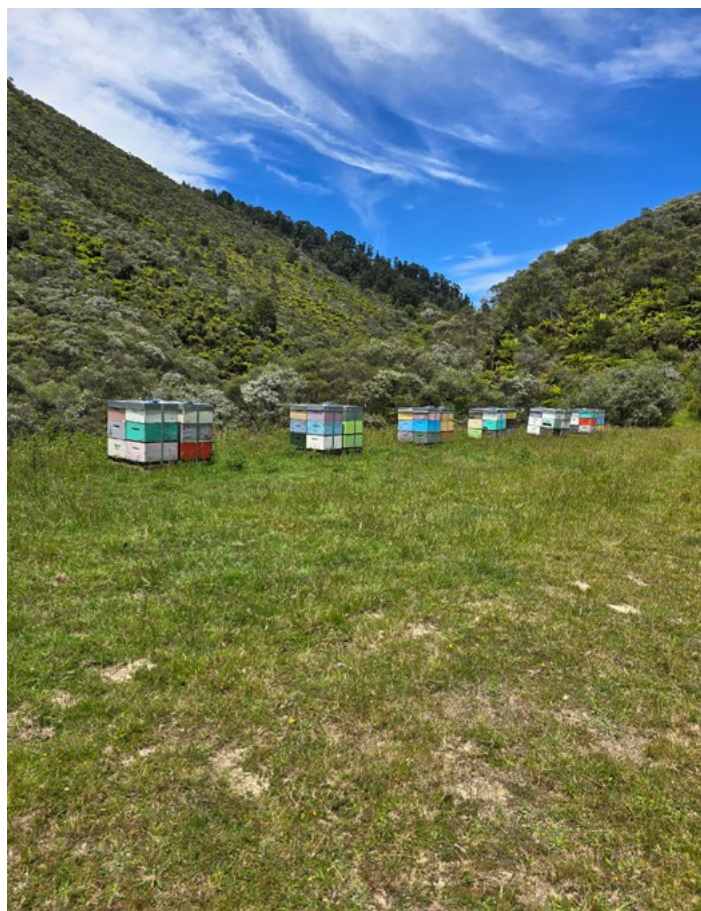
"It was an exceptional flowering, and the bees looked good. It appeared to be all lining up well and we got our hot week, around December 10, and so early blocks did good initially. Then later blocks from Christmas, I actually don't know how they did it but some have done some honey anyway."

At the top of the island Matt Goldsworthy of Goldsworthy Apiaries is also reporting a good flowering of mānuka, and kamahi, but limited crop, especially the latter.

"Most beekeepers I talk to are pretty miserable about it," he says.

"Everything was looking good up until Christmas, and then it rained ... we might average out a box, box and a half, which is below average. Then some dew on top of that."

Interestingly, high-country areas of the South Island where



East Valley honey beehives taking advantage of the pre-Christmas sun, before big yellow turned off and honey gathering slowed.

Photo: Martin Crisp.

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*Kaimai Range Honey bee hives are helicoptered to remote manuka sites.
Photo: Jody Mitchell.*

clover, vipers bugloss (aka blue borage) and other wild flowers grow has seen striking blossom, but little honey as a result – yet. Goldsworthy is in his third season with hives at the country's largest farm, Molesworth Station.

"It is blue and white up the Molesworth, so they could still do something up there. If we get the heat they will still crank up," he says.

It's a similar story in Otago, Rawson reports.

"Central Otago has been slow and another place where there is so much flower, but it just isn't in the honey boxes yet. Borage, clover, you name it, it is there and flowering. It looks like a beekeeper's heaven, but without it in the boxes yet everything is counting on the first three weeks of February, max. A couple of weeks of decent sunshine and we will see some honey I think. If the sun doesn't shine now, it will probably be a miserable season," the Oamaru beekeeper says.

At Alpine Honey Specialties in Wanaka owner Peter Ward says the hives in the high country have filled one box of borage honey and not moved any higher, due to a run of cold nights. As for his mānuka crop – "definitely below average, it wouldn't have done 20kg a hive, but some areas maybe got to 25kg".

His southern season recap could well stand for the whole of the country – "Somewhere between disappointing and average. It is definitely not going to be a blinder." 🐝



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One Vote, One Member – Basics of New Industry Body Proposal Revealed



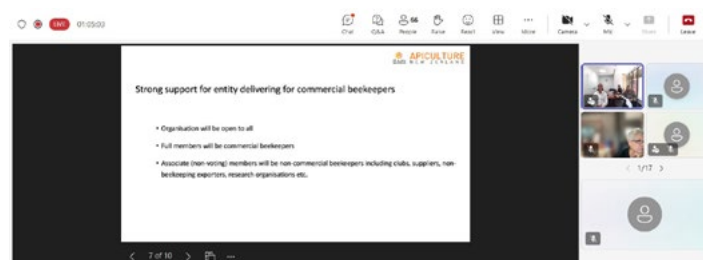
‘One vote, one member’, only commercial beekeepers have voting rights, and potential fees of approximately \$400/year plus \$1/hive – details of Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc’s (NZBI) proposed new industry group have been discussed at a January 28 ApiNZ Special General Meeting.

The SGM, held online via video link but hosted from Wellington by ApiNZ’s independent chair, Nathan Guy, was “procedural” as members unanimously passed a motion to adapt the constitution to meet the requirements of the updated Incorporated Societies Act 2022. That job taken care of, chief executive Karin Kos took the opportunity to bring members up to speed with the latest in efforts to form a new group to represent New Zealand’s beekeepers, followed by NZBI advisor Ian Fletcher’s thoughts on the matter of new governance.

While the two industry groups have at times been at odds over how best to represent beekeepers and the honey industry, recent months have seen Kos and Fletcher working closely together on not only aiding the Ministry for Primary Industries’ response to the yellow-legged hornet incursion in Auckland, but on drawing up the basics of a potential new industry body which might prove more effective in attracting and representing beekeeper members on a national level.

“A co-joined industry effort has a lot more clout and ability to interact with government than operating as separate organisations,” Kos made clear to the January 28 meeting.

In December and January two meetings have been held with a group of 10 beekeepers who were presented the concept of the new industry body in an effort to “stress test” it before a full unveiling. More changes are expected to be made to that concept in the coming weeks, but it is hoped a proposal will be presented to the wider industry in February, and “hopefully early February”.



The Apiculture NZ SGM on January 28 was tuned into online by 68 connections, where “procedural” constitutional changes were passed before the latest thinking regarding a new commercial-beekeeper-centric industry body was discussed.

A lot more detail of the proposal will become clear then, and beekeepers’ opinions will be sought and changes likely made. From there it is hoped a new industry body might be stood up by “June or July”.

Key details were discussed at the ApiNZ SGM though, and questions came from the floor to the ApiNZ leadership. Three slides titled ‘purpose’, ‘governance’ and ‘funding’ underpinned Kos’ presentation.

The purpose of the proposed new group included a list of topics outlined during an open-floor discussion at ApiNZ’s annual general meeting in Christchurch in July 2025, as well as through a roadshow of meetings with beekeepers around New Zealand undertaken by Kos and Fletcher in the second half of 2025. The broad purpose of ‘advocacy with regulators, industry and the public of New Zealand’ topped the list, with ‘promotion of best practice beekeeping’, honey market access support, information sharing, and supporting regional beekeeping groups also mentioned.

As for governance, the proposal at this stage will see only commercial beekeepers hold voting rights – with what or who is deemed a ‘commercial beekeeper’ as yet undefined – and a ‘one vote, one-member’ equal weighting. That would see the country’s largest beekeepers, in ownership of tens of thousands of hives, holding equal weight as those with, potentially, as few as several dozen, or several hundred, colonies should they chose to become members.

Muddying that system is the proposed voluntary funding where a flat fee of \$400 per commercial beekeeping member was mentioned, alongside a “small” per-hive fee of perhaps \$1. That would mean the country’s largest beekeeping companies would be expected to pay \$15-20,000 in membership fees and be rewarded with the same voting weight as those paying around \$600.

Kos would not be drawn on what an initial budget would look like, but ApiNZ policy analyst Phil Edmonds stated they were working on just 20% of commercial beekeepers joining the group initially.

“It is pretty clear this is going to be a lean organisation from the get-up. That reflects a reset and the tough times we have been through. The new organisation has to be realistic about that,” Kos said.

That attitude follows a slide in finances at ApiNZ over several years as membership fees combined with meagre additional income has failed to meet expenses, leading to tax-payer top ups and industry-good moneys from the Honey Industry Trust propping the group up over recent years.

"We have funding constraints and if we have to wind down the industry loses because it is not only institutional knowledge that walks out the door, but what I would call soft assets, our website and some of things referred to (*The Beekeeper* magazine, ApiNZ library) which would easily transfer over to a new organisation," Guy explained.

The proposed group would have a clear commercial beekeeping focus, but there would be an 'associate' membership class for non-commercial beekeepers and other industry stakeholders. That would come without voting rights though.

More will become apparent in the coming weeks, but at least one thing is clear according to ApiNZ – it will be a "new" organisation which will be proposed.

"It is not an ApiNZ or NZBI mark-two, it is a genuine new organisation which will aim to bring the strengths of those organisations together," Kos said.

"How do we move from the current two organisations to one organisation? That is going to require feedback from everyone."

And that is a point both Kos and Fletcher reinforced – the coming months and the level of beekeeper engagement to the new proposal will be critical to shaping a successful new organisation which beekeepers want to back.



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While leadership from existing national-level industry groups Apiculture NZ and NZ Beekeeping Inc have been working together, any industry group proposed in the coming months would be a "genuine new organisation" they say.

"We can make any organisation you want, but it is only if it reflects the will of the membership that it will be effective," Fletcher added.

"We need to get a clear sense from the community what a successful outcome would look like. That means thinking about two things. One, what are the provisions that will be there most of the time. The second part is, the campaigning part. What are the big issues where we have to roll our sleeves up, be tough, be focused, and win."

The NZBI advisor reinforced – "It has to have a point". Whether that "point" is more in line with NZBI's "campaigning-style" as Fletcher describes it, or ApiNZ's broader industry representation will be a key determination for beekeepers.

"Don't just leave it to the working group," Fletcher said, adding, "We have to know what it is you want and what it is you think will make a difference in the end." 🐝

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Mānuka Charitable Trust Scores Own Goal in Trademark Attack on Comvita Mānuka Honey Cosmetics



Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT) has upended a four-year Comvita marketing effort in the US by opposing “THE MĀNUKA EFFECT” trademark application. A suite of Comvita mānuka honey cosmetics is sold under that pending trademark. A joint venture between Comvita and Hollywood A-lister-linked Caravan Digital sponsored the creation of the cosmetics. MCT failed to see the New Zealand connection. Bruce Roscoe reports.

BY BRUCE ROSCOE

This was a mountain mānuka honey always wanted to climb – a mountain piercing rarefied air and inhabited by luminaries in the worlds of entertainment and sports who would reserve a place for it in their life kit, and sing its praises from the summit. A cosmetics product wasn’t a jar of honey but good vibes from one could migrate to the other.

Comvita attempted such an ascent in December 2021 when it partnered with Vancouver, B.C.-headquartered Caravan Digital L.P. to launch the joint venture Caravan Honey Company. Today this venture lies in ruins but the suite of Comvita mānuka honey cosmetics it launched is as alive as the trademark opposition Mānuka Charitable Trust filed on 5 January with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

MCT failed to see the New Zealand connection in the Caravan Honey Company application for “THE MĀNUKA EFFECT” trademark under which a suite of five cosmetics said to contain Comvita “medical grade” mānuka honey was launched in October 2025

under the Aunu brand. Comvita contributed NZD5.9m in capital and expenses to the development of the cosmetics and the digital platform on which they are sold.

Caravan Digital links to Creative Arts Agency (CAA) in Los Angeles. Julia Roberts, Meryl Streep, Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Eric Clapton, Son Heung-Min, former President Barack Obama and first-lady Michelle Obama (for their books) are among luminaries, past or present, who populate the roster of CAA. Newer age celebrities, from the worlds of Hip-Hop and YouTube, for example, are no less represented. The agency is one of the Hollywood control trinity– the other two are William Morris Endeavor and United Talent Agency.

Caravan Digital’s website claims a “partnership with CAA” and the ability to offer “proprietary access to the CAA ecosystem”.

“NOT RELATED TO NEW ZEALAND”

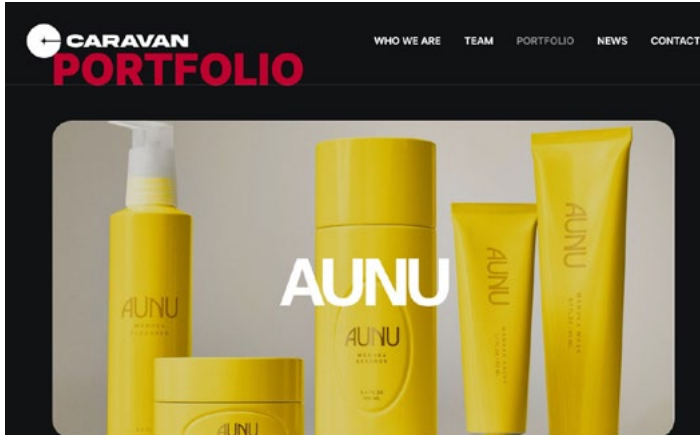
MCT states in a notice of opposition, now lodged before the USPTO Trademark Trial and Appeal Board, that it had “searched



for a web presence" for Caravan Honey Company to no avail. The applicant was "not a New Zealand entity", MCT concluded.

MCT further searched the website of UMF Honey Association (UMFHA) for "caravan" and "caravan honey" but results showed "no certified brands bearing that name".

"Therefore", MCT stated, "on information and belief, Caravan Honey Company's intended use of the trademark was "not related to New Zealand nor the Māori people".



The Aunu range includes five mānuka honey cosmetic products, with honey supplied to the American company by Comvita and marketed using THE MANUKA EFFECT™, a trademark being opposed by The Mānuka Charitable Trust.

To pile-drive the point, MCT, noting that Caravan Honey was addressed to 1560 Broadway, Suite 810, New York, wrote: "Consumers generally know the Māori people do not originate from New York".

MCT concluded it would be "damaged" if "New York-based owners" obtained "rights to use a Taonga and a part of mātauranga Māori despite not being associated with the Māori people nor...sourcing honey from New Zealand..."

Variations are minor in MCT's opposition filings, which resemble a one-size-fits-all template. Responding to the "Force Factor Royal Manuka Honey" trademark application filed in March 2025 by Force Factor Brands LLC, a dietary supplements company located in Boston, MCT wrote: "Consumers generally know the Māori people do not originate from Massachusetts".

OLD NEWS

Comvita announced its intention to form the Caravan venture to NZX on 6 September 2021. *Radio New Zealand* ("Comvita partners with celebrity brand promoter Caravan") and the *New Zealand Herald* ("Comvita hitches Caravan for celebrity brand promotion in North America") reported the news the same day. Online trade press, such as just-food.com, also ran the story.

The venture, Caravan Honey Company L.P., was owned 50:50 by Caravan Digital L.P. and Comvita and registered in the state of Delaware on 8 December 2021. Caravan Digital also is registered in Delaware, a tax-haven state.

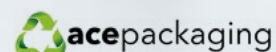
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AI references "Comvita", "mānuka honey", and "Caravan" in the first sentence of a succinct summary (search tip: "caravan" + "mānuka honey"), while helpfully distinguishing the venture from Caravan COFFEE STAND that once sold mānuka honey in the Japanese port city of Yokohama. The Comvita announcement to NZX appears at or near the top of search results.

Searching the internet for "The Mānuka Effect" pending trademark itself shows the Aunu Beauty website and Aunu Instagram videos of expert and influencer testimonials also in the top five results. In one video, Dr Adam Geyer, who introduces himself as Aunu's chief of dermatology, notes Aunu's "exclusive access to Comvita's Medihoney.™"

UMFHA, a hybrid of industry association and private members' club, does not fully disclose members, licensees, or licensees' brands. Rather, the UMFHA website in search results shows the brands that licensees have allowed to be displayed. One licensee, for example, may operate as many as six UMF brands – in some cases more product label than brand – but select only one or two of those for display. It is not possible for consumers – or trademark attorneys – to confirm that the mānuka honey they encounter is "certified" by UMFHA.

Several companies are addressed to 1560 Broadway, Suite 810, which appears to serve as shared office space or business center in New York. MCT, an essentially North Island entity that addresses to 15 Show Place, Addington, Christchurch, will understand addresses of convenience or compromise.

Financial statement junkies can find 25 references to the Caravan venture in documents publicly disclosed by Comvita in 2021-2024.

VICTORIA & JENNIFER

"Victoria Beckham Beauty Veteran Launches Aunu, a Skin Care Brand Celebrating Mānuka Honey" headlined a 22 October 2025 report by Emily Burns in *Beautyinc*. "Jennifer Krouse has partnered with New Zealand-based producer Comvita to bring medical-grade Mānuka topicals to the market", the article began.

Victoria Beckham, wife of soccer icon Sir David Beckham, achieved global stardom as Posh Spice in the 1990s' pop phenomenon the Spice Girls. She later launched fashion and beauty product labels. Jennifer Krouse served as Lady Beckham's chief operating and financial officer at Victoria Beckham Beauty in New York for four years before devoting herself to Aunu in March 2024.

Between that Aunu foundation date and the Aunu website launch seven months later, Comvita's relationship with Caravan Digital had disintegrated. But a direct parallel relationship appears intact between Ms Krouse and Comvita for the bulk supply of mānuka honey as an ingredient for manufacture of the cosmetics within the US.

Aunu website and social media content presentation evince a large investment and finely tuned advertisement for both the finished products and raw material. There is nothing home-baked about any section of the site.

Mānuka is written with a macron throughout and occurs, mostly in the same breath as Medihoney™, about 30 times throughout the site's 17 product pages and science, ingredients, and source (that is, New Zealand) sections. All is amplified by active social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram; Tik Tok videos to come). A media page introduces product launch coverage in 23 high-wattage cosmetics publications. A LinkedIn account is active.

THE SKINNY ON AUNU BEAUTY

"Aunu Is Convincing Me That Mānuka Honey Is the Key to a Healthier Skin Barrier" a *Marie Claire* headline proclaimed in a 23 October 2025 testimonial by Hannah Baxter, who began, "The new skincare brand is elevating the New Zealand ingredient to a luxury staple".

The *Marie Claire* article is among some 22 beauty trade press raves that showered the Aunu skincare collection in praise. Sure, the writers were sent free samples. But their pleasure reads as real.

Aunu Beauty of New York uses Comvita's Medihoney™ mānuka honey as an ingredient in all five products of the skincare collection it launched 25 October 2025. Under the catchphrase, "BUILD A BETTER BARRIER+ Stronger Skin Starts Here", the Aunu website states: "Powered by AUNU's Mānuka Effect™, our medical-grade Mānuka honey system supports barrier repair plus, to show measurable clinical results within a 30-day skin cycle..."

Aunu defines "medical grade" manuka as containing a minimum 357 milligrams of methylglyoxal per kilogram of honey. No mention is made of sterilization by gamma radiation as required for actual medical-use honey. The five products that make up the Aunu cosmetics range — mānuka cleanser, mānuka salve, mānuka mask, mānuka cream, and mānuka essence — are priced at NZ dollar equivalent values of 99-188.



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Leaping Bunny is on top of things. Certification by this bunny attests to cruelty-free products. Bunny's brand page says, "Aunu is a prestige skincare brand that utilizes the key ingredient of Mānuka honey. Our Mānuka honey is sourced directly from Comvita..." The Aunu website acknowledges that the mānuka tree is a "treasured Māori species".

SELF-SABOTAGE

MCT's intellectual property role has been funded by a war chest of about NZD6.7m or NZD8.2m when committed funds are added (Table 1). UMFHA, the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), are the principal source of these funds. Also, under an MPI co-investment requirement, three mānuka honey producers, which include Comvita, contribute funds directly to MCT.

Comvita records starting equity and expense payments of NZD5.9m for Caravan Honey Company. That increases to NZD7.1m if equity-accounted losses of NZD1.3m from two reporting periods are added. Comvita, as the largest funder of UMFHA through its levy payments, in a circular way has funded the opposition to trademark protection for products that contain and champion its own honey.

THE MCT LONG GAME

Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT) fights on two fronts — one is to trademark the word mānuka as Māori intellectual property and the other is to stop non-New Zealanders from trademarking it at all. It is registering more success on the second than first of these fronts. But it appears to be playing a long game where, though battles are lost along the way, it can win the war. It needs a lot of money to do that.

Although MCT may appear as a small, modestly funded non-governmental organisation, its funding to date has reached NZD8.2m or NZD6.7m when adjusted for committed funds that have yet to be drawn down (Table 1). Those amounts equal 37.8% or 30.8% of total UMF Honey Association revenue (NZD21.7m) received from mainly levies, licences, and memberships from March 2003-March 2025. MCT draws on funds from three sources – UMF Honey Association, the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE; via the Provincial Growth Fund), and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI; via the Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures Fund). MCT is guided by 10 trustees (as of 7 February 2020), conducts business through Te Pitau Ltd, its operating arm which is governed by six directors. Indigenous rights law firm Kahui Legal, trademark attorney Southern Cross Intellectual Property, and public relations firm Acumen New Zealand act for the trust. It is chaired by Victor Goldsmith of Ngāti Porou and a former director of UMF Honey Association. MPI, citing Treaty of Waitangi obligation, in August 2019 mandated establishment of the trust, which was incorporated February 2020.

MCT in December 2024 also opposed a US trademark application filed by Streamland Honey Group, which is a UMFHA member and licensee located in Rotorua. Streamland Honey surrendered. Should neither MCT nor Caravan Honey capitulate, both may become engaged in 16 stages of litigation through August 2027, according to a case schedule published by USPTO.

CARAVANS & CONNECTIONS

Comvita in its 6 September 2021 announcement to NZX described Caravan as a "Joint Venture with entertainment and sports agency, Creative Artists Agency (CAA)". This is incomplete. Companies A and B invest equally in new company C, which becomes the "joint venture". Comvita names neither the venture it is forming nor the name of one partner in the "Joint Venture" of its announcement.

A connection between Caravan Digital and CAA is explained in the *Hollywood Reporter* article "Seeking to Expand Your Celebrity Brand? CAA-Backed Caravan Can Help With That" (7 March 2024) but neither Caravan Digital nor CAA has responded to requests for confirmation of the maintenance of this link. According to US cosmetics trade press, CAA leavers were among the founders of Creative Labs L.P. (which was renamed Caravan Digital in March 2021). Caravan Digital's stated "partnership" with CAA appears as a description of an informal cooperative relationship that grew out of shared personal history.

Comvita had begun a "strategic partnership" with Caravan, central to which was the "formation of a celebrity-backed lifestyle brand" for mānuka and propolis, according to the 2021 announcement. No brand name was announced then or later. Comvita puffed: "Our partnership...will amplify the awareness and benefits (of mānuka honey and propolis) through the eyes of celebrities who turn to Comvita for solutions".

TABLE 1: RECORD OF TE PITAU LTD FUNDING (a)

(NZD thousands)

Funder	Period	Amount
MBIE (b)	2020.10-	5,700.0
MPI (c)	2024-2026	587.5
UMFHA (d)	2002-	1,722.0
UMFHA (e)	2002-	100.0
Industry (f)	2002-	113.2
Total		8,222.7
less govt. funds still to be drawn down as of Jan 15:		
MBIE		890.0
MPI		650.5
Adjusted total (g)		6,682.2

Notes:

- (a) Te Pitau Ltd is the operating arm of Manuka Charitable Trust.
- (b) Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (via Provincial Growth Fund)
- (c) Ministry for Primary Industries (via Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures Fund)
- (d) UMF Honey Association (directly)
- (e) UMFHA share of SFFF industry co-investment amount.
- (f) Comvita, Manuka Doctor, and Manuka Health make up "industry".
- (g) Does not include UMFHA NZD200,000 donation budgeted for March 2026 year.

Source: UMFHA annual reports and MBIE and MPI records & websites.

The announcement teased: "...exact details of timing and products are commercially sensitive, but we look forward to sharing more details in due course." No details were shared. But it soon became clear that whatever Comvita thought it had bought, Caravan Digital wasn't selling.

No celebrities would emerge to sprinkle stardust over Comvita or turn to the company "for solutions". Celebrities, particularly those in the upper echelons through to A-lister, do not sully their standing by plugging products.

In Caravan Digital's world, the customer is the celebrity or links to a celebrity. The celebrity name value is converted into revenue through the sale of own-brand products. Caravan Digital promotes and grows the brands through forming business partnerships, directing the creation of websites and other digital content, and advertising.

Aunu receives top billing in the portfolio section of Caravan Digital's website. The linkage to Lady Beckham is indirect but "Victoria Beckham Beauty" and "Posh Spice" are powerful associations nonetheless.

Comvita and mānuka beauty products may be star-crossed. The Caravan misfire is the second time around for Comvita to invest in a five-product skincare suite to the promises of the world but the world doesn't show up. Or if it does, it's on someone else's doorstep. Comvita launched the hūni® skincare range in New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and UK in October 2007. Within four years, the project was halted in silence.

FROM CURTAIN-RAISER TO CLOSING CREDITS – THE TIMELINE OF A COMVITA (MIS)ADVENTURE

6 SEPTEMBER 2021

"Celebrities will come to Comvita for solutions"

– excerpt from Comvita notice to NZX about the slated venture with Caravan Digital

22 AUGUST 2023

"This 50% investment is progressing in line with expectations, with a talent-backed skincare range to be launched in H1 FY24."

– Comvita June 2023 year annual report

29 AUGUST 2024

"Caravan Honey – \$4.3M related to 45%(a) investment in this skincare JV in North America not considered recoverable."

– Comvita June 2024 year presentation

26 SEPTEMBER 2024 (release date)

"An impairment of \$4,251,000 has been recognised related to the Caravan Honey investment, reducing the carrying value to nil at 30 June 2024".

– Comvita June 2024 year financial statements

Note: (a) Comvita recorded its stake in Caravan Honey at 50% in June 2022-June 2023 and 45% in June 2024 financial statements.

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Sheena Bacal
Key Account Manager -
Food & Bioanalytical



VANISHING POINT

A photo of a palm tree-lined avenue is used as the banner image on both the Caravan Digital website and Facebook page. It is a segment of Sunset Boulevard, the storied thoroughfare stretching from downtown Los Angeles to the Pacific Coast Highway via Hollywood, Sunset Strip in West Hollywood, and Beverly Hills through to Pacific Palisades. It is a dream-weaving nursery of celebrity culture. Terrain in some stretches is high enough to see either side of the boulevard converge into a near vanishing point. Caravan Digital's website records no Los Angeles office address.



Screenshot from www.hellocaravan.com

The metaphorical point at which Comvita shareholder funds vanished was situated about a one-hour flight away to the north east where Comvita appeared to have mistaken Los Angeles for Los Vegas. Comvita had played a zero-sum game where, as in poker, no value is created when an amount of money changes hands between loser and winner. (Comvita impaired its Caravan Honey Company investment to nil in accounts to June 2024. Table 2).

Not all may be lost. Creative minds may see a movie in this account of left and right hands seemingly uncaring of what activity engages the other hand against a backdrop of lust for stardust. Genre selection – action, comedy, farce, horror, suspense, or unrequited love – could be problematic. Maybe a genre-bending blend would attract a studio looking for that illusive something that has everything. Just don't expect CAA from 2000 Avenue of the Stars in the city of angels to volunteer any A-listers or even extras anytime soon.

Bruce Roscoe is a Japan-resident researcher and former foreign correspondent and securities analyst. 🐝

References: This report has been sourced from Comvita Ltd financial statements, annual reports, and announcements to NZX; UMF Honey Association financial statements; records of the Ministry for Primary Industries and Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment; trademark application and opposition filings made with the US Patent and Trademark Office; records of the Division of Corporations of the US State of Delaware; and the websites of Caravan Digital and Aunu Beauty. Note: Some data values may not add due to rounding.

TABLE 2: RECORD OF COMVITA FUNDING OF CARAVAN HONEY COMPANY (a)

(NZD thousands)

Year to	Purpose	Amount
June 2022 (b)	Share purchase	5,092.0
June 2022	JV expenses	100.0
June 2024	JV expenses	700.0
Total		5,892.0
Appendix: Record of Losses and Write-downs		
June 2023	E-a Loss (c)	600.0
June 2024	E-a Loss (c)	700.0
June 2024 (d)	Investment Write-down	4,251.0

Notes:

- (a) The joint venture is or was between Comvita Ltd and Caravan Digital L.P.
- (b) USD3,379,500; 22 December 2021
- (c) Equity-accounted JV losses reflecting Comvita's stated ownership of 50% at June 2022 and 2023 and 45% at June 2024 balance dates.
- (d) Caravan investment impaired to nil.

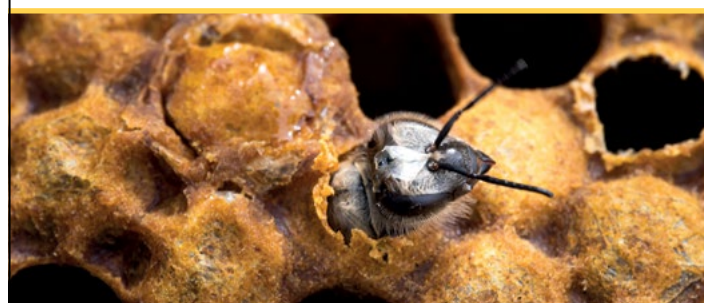
Source: Comvita financial statements and annual reports.



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Comvita Requests MCT Withdraw Trademark Opposition



Finding itself with money on both sides of a US trademark case (as detailed in *Mānuka Charitable Trust Scores Own Goal in Trademark Attack on Comvita Mānuka Honey Cosmetics*), Comvita Ltd. has formally requested that Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT) withdraws their opposition to the Caravan Honey Co. application. However, MCT has confirmed they will be following their process, claiming the integrity of New Zealand's mānuka honey is at stake.

Comvita's "formal request" was made of MCT in the penultimate week of January, following MCT's opposition filing against 'THE MĀNUKA EFFECT' trademark application to the US Patent and Trademark Office on January 5 and subsequent requests from *Apiarist's Advocate* seeking clarity as to both sides' respective positions on the matter.

Chair of Te Pitau, MCT's operating arm, Kristen Kohere-Soutar says the matter will be discussed when their Legal Advisory Committee meets on February 10. Even then a change in tact looks unlikely

though, with the Trust releasing a statement to *Apiarist's Advocate* detailing their position on the matter of foreign-owned brands using so-called New Zealand mānuka honey.

'Decisions to maintain or withdraw an opposition are made only once the Legal Advisory Committee is satisfied that the mana, mauri, and long-term value of mānuka are appropriately protected,' the statement reads.

The Trust's legal committee is made up of, Kohere-Soutar, Lynell Tuffery-Huria (Te Pitau director), Tony Wright (UMF Honey Association CEO) and Marcus Rudkin (representing Honey



CART 0

AUNU is proud to partner with Comvita™, the original pioneer of Mānuka honey, and New Zealand beekeepers with five decades of perfecting their craft. Certified B Corp, Comvita™ has saved over 62M bees since 2021.



A screenshot of website claims from *aunubeaauty.com* regarding the source of their honey, Comvita. But it is not good enough for the Mānuka Charitable Trust who have stated, '... marketing statements do not provide the Trust with authority or certainty should circumstances shift.'

New Zealand (International) Ltd.). Interestingly, until he left the company in August 2024, Comvita CEO David Banfield was at times an invitee, for specific matters.

The brand at the centre of the trademark dispute is Aunu, supplied by Caravan Honey Ltd, of which Comvita previously held as much as a 50% ownership share. Having impaired (equivalent to writing-down its book value) that investment to a carrying value of nil at 30 June 2024, Comvita say they no longer have an ownership stake in the North American company.

'At this time (30 June 2024), the investment was still in the development stage and further funding was required to support the launch of the products commercially. Due to the uncertainty of securing funding, our investment was impaired at this time,' Comvita have stated to *Apiarist's Advocate*.

Comvita's request to MCT to withdraw opposition is based off their position that Aunu is 'solely using New Zealand sourced Mānuka honey in its products'.

'While Comvita no longer has an ownership interest in Caravan, we continue to have an ongoing commercial arrangement with the business. We continue to supply Caravan with premium Comvita™ Medihoney™ sourced from New Zealand and Caravan have built

their brand on selling genuine New Zealand Mānuka honey sourced from Comvita,' they state.

MCT's statement makes their position clear though: 'Supply alone does not equate to control'.

MCT states, 'Where a foreign entity owns the trademark, there is no binding obligation that future sourcing remains exclusively with New Zealand, nor that product claims continue to align with New Zealand definitions of genuine mānuka honey. In those circumstances, offshore brand owners are legally free to substitute Australian tea tree or blended material while continuing to trade on the mānuka name, undermining consumer trust and eroding the mana and mauri of the species.'

While the Trust looks long term, Comvita's statement on the matter outlines the impact that could have on the mānuka honey industry now.

'Comvita has a deep partnership with Caravan, who are experts in skincare, and show a commitment to improving the marketing of Mānuka honey on the world stage. Through this relationship, Comvita and the broader industry benefit from increased knowledge by customers of Mānuka and Mānuka honey globally, and what it takes to win in different categories,' the honey exporter states.

FULL STATEMENT OF POSITION FROM MĀNUKA CHARITABLE TRUST'S LEGAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE, JANUARY 30 2026:

The Legal Advisory Committee's (LAC) policy of opposing trademark applications by non-New Zealand entities is grounded in a simple principle: once control over the use of the word mānuka sits offshore, New Zealand loses the ability to safeguard its integrity, provenance, and cultural value. Mānuka is a taonga species, not a generic descriptor, and where ownership and enforcement rights are held outside New Zealand, there are limited practical mechanisms to prevent misuse, dilution, or misappropriation of the term over time.

The Committee recognises that many New Zealand companies supply bulk mānuka honey to international and white-label brands, and that these supply relationships are commercially important. However, supply alone does not equate to control. Where a foreign entity owns the trademark, there is no binding obligation that future sourcing remains exclusively with New Zealand, nor that product claims continue to align with New Zealand definitions of genuine mānuka honey. In those circumstances, offshore brand owners are legally free to substitute Australian tea tree or blended material while continuing to trade on the mānuka name, undermining consumer trust and eroding the mana and mauri of the species.

For this reason, the LAC's default position is to file oppositions to foreign trademark applications where ownership or long-term sourcing intent is uncertain. Trademark law operates on strict timeframes, and failure to oppose at the outset can permanently remove the ability to act later. Lodging an opposition does not pre-judge the outcome; it preserves options while appropriate diligence is undertaken to assess whether the integrity of mānuka will, in fact, be upheld with the trade mark use.



The brandmark which Mānuka Charitable Trust hopes to gain certification trademark for in key mānuka honey markets in an effort to authenticate mānuka honey supply.

Where the ongoing supply of New Zealand mānuka honey is said to be critical to an offshore brand, the Committee's view is that protection should be embedded in enforceable commercial arrangements. This includes rights around exclusive New Zealand sourcing, audit and verification, or the ability to withdraw supply if standards or representations change. Absent those mechanisms, assurances or marketing statements do not provide the Trust with authority or certainty should circumstances shift.

This approach is not intended to restrict legitimate trade or New Zealand businesses operating internationally. The LAC does not oppose New Zealand-owned entities, nor does it seek to impede export relationships. Rather, the policy reflects a broader mandate to prevent long-term commodification of mānuka and sits alongside the development of the Certified Trade Mark (CTM), which provides a positive pathway for international brands to participate under clear rules and enforceable obligations. Decisions to maintain or withdraw an opposition are made only once the Legal Advisory Committee is satisfied that the mana, mauri, and long-term value of mānuka are appropriately protected.' 🐝

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Beekeepers' Hornet Bounty Idea Lands in MPI's Too Hard Basket



With yellow-legged hornet nests continuing to be found on Auckland's North Shore, more than six months on from the first *Vespa velutina* finds in the city, some beekeepers are calling for a 'bounty' programme of financial incentives to be implemented to help encourage more finds. However, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) say the increased workload on them to police the process is too much.

Don Tweeddale believes finding the money will be easy – “all we need is the people who are out there to destroy it to be happy to be notified,” says the owner of Tweeddale's Honey, one of New Zealand's largest beekeeping businesses.



Image created by ChatGPT.

Those people would be the staff at MPI's Biosecurity New Zealand agency, who have already responded to approximately 10,500 notifications since October and destroyed 48 queen hornets in that time, 35 with nests (as at February 1).

“We actually get a lot more traction with people and better outcomes when public reporting is kept safe, accurate, and done in the genuine best interest of protecting New Zealand – not for financial reward,” says Mike Inglis, Biosecurity NZ commissioner north.

“Offering a financial reward could encourage poor behaviours and cost us more resource and time. For example, paying could encourage incorrect or misleading reports like old photos/harmless bugs/deliberate false finds, overwhelming response teams and slowing down genuine investigations.”

Tweeddale isn't buying the reasoning though, or that altruism from the wider public is worth relying on.

“If they want to go down that line, I am pretty sure this hornet will take off,” the Taihape beekeeper says.

He stresses the need to eliminate as many nests as possible, before the colonies breed queens to hibernate the winter and which are much harder to locate.

“This could be funded not by them, but by New Zealand's commercial beekeepers and other interested parties. This is an independent reward system. Biosecurity NZ will deal with destruction, and we will put up the reward. I can't see anything wrong with that,” Tweeddale says.

“If you can get a whole heap of eyes and ears who are incentivised to find it, it is a whole heap better than a handful of employees trying to find the thing.”

He has an ally in another of the country's largest and longest serving beekeepers, Arataki Honey owner Russell Berry. The pair have discussed the bounty idea, and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI), of which Berry is an executive member, have pushed the concept in recent incursion response meetings with MPI. The idea has been handed straight back to them though.

“New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated has raised the potential of a reward programme, and we have suggested the industry body work up what that may look like as part of wider surveillance by beekeepers through their own organisations,” Inglis says.

NZBI advisor Ian Fletcher has been in those meetings suggesting the bounty system and believes MPI's response shows a lack of belief in the competency of their systems.

"We think this response misses the positive effect of sustained and sustaining community engagement, and undersells our ability to build a system that filters reports that are not genuinely likely to require further investigation. We certainly think it's an idea worth a more serious examination," Fletcher says.

NZBI have promoted to MPI the need for hornet surveillance outside of the 11km zone extending from where current finds have been made. In that area extensive trapping has taken place and in January male hornets have been caught and fitted with 160mg radio tracking devices to help locate nests.

Nine nests were found on the North Shore in January, with at least three of the finds aided by the radio tracking.

Are there yellow-legged hornets further afield in New Zealand? Biosecurity NZ believes "it is unlikely" and say "they are closely monitoring the situation", but have not explained how.

NZBI say they have made clear to MPI their concern at the lack of organised delimiting surveys outside of Auckland, with the risk being that a queen hornet(s) has 'hitchhiked' its way to a location further afield. A bounty system could significantly reduce the chances of the hornet establishing elsewhere they believe, but it seems to have been flicked to the 'too hard' basket by the response's leaders.


"If we don't run a reward system, if we rely on the government to find it, with the help of voluntary information – how many people



A yellow-legged hornet nest, in Portugal. MPI should be assisting with implementation of a bounty system to encourage nest finds in New Zealand say beekeepers.

are voluntarily going to look out into their backyard and look for a hornets' nest? Virtually nobody," Tweeddale says.

"But if there was a good incentive, we might have a chance of getting rid of the queens this autumn." 🐝



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Remembering John Rawcliffe, Staunch Mānuka Honey Champion



On December 4 2025 John Rawcliffe passed away suddenly in Malaysia, age 64. He staunchly served New Zealand's mānuka honey industry for more than two decades, including leading the UMF Honey Association (UMFHA) from 2000 to 2023.

Those who worked alongside him pay tribute to a friend and colleague who delivered a lasting impact through an unwavering commitment to mānuka honey's scientific integrity and gaining its consumers protection.

TONY WRIGHT, UMF HONEY ASSOCIATION CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A word I have heard used a lot in reference to John is passion. He certainly had plenty of that! He was unquestionably an early champion of New Zealand as the only source of authentic mānuka honey, and I remember him coming to a UMFHA Board meeting many years ago with the idea that we should seek certification trademark protection. Defending New Zealand's rights to mānuka is a legacy from John that we continue to pursue.

People who knew John will know he also had a passion for music. One of my favourite memories of John was at a bar in China where he took over the microphone and did his rendition of 'What a Wonderful World' while another industry figure did a slow dance in front of the stage. Yes, I have the video. No, I'm not sharing it.

I travelled with John several times, usually trying to resolve some market access issue, and was always impressed by his ability to network and build collaboration partnerships. Others have commented on his impact via the Mānuka ID project and his reach

into the international honey expert community. That felt like his happy place – meeting people, doing deals, and having fun along the way.

The current UMFHA team all joined while John was at the helm. They remember his commitment to the industry, UMFHA members large and small, support for his team, and his care for his family. His energy, humour and love of people and the good times will live long in many memories.

Our thoughts are with his family, and on that note, I'll leave the last word to his daughter Ella Rawcliffe:

I spent some time working for the UMFHA in an administrative role and know how invested Dad was in your story that has so many high points; working with the environment and science to bring income and investment to some of the most far-flung reaches of the country was such a passion for him.

- Kind regards, Ella Rawcliffe

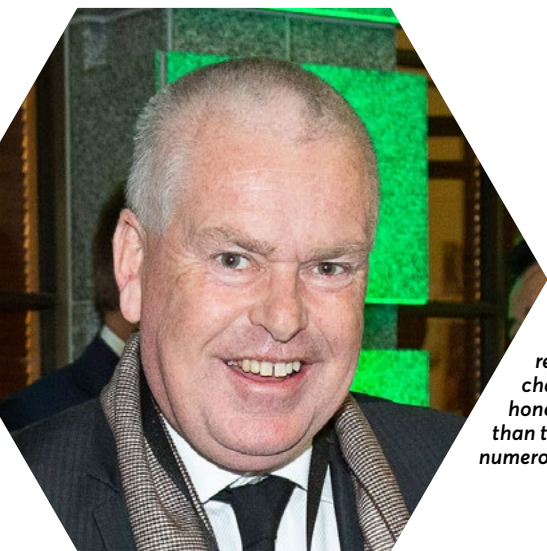
Ella suggests anyone wishing to do so makes a contribution to the Native Forest Restoration Trust: <https://www.nftrt.org.nz/make-a-donation>

MARGARET BENNETT, BEEKEEPER, UMFHA FOUNDER AND FORMER DIRECTOR

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the news of the recent sudden and unexpected passing of the industry stalwart John Rawcliffe.

For more than 20 years John worked tirelessly for the good of the New Zealand honey industry, New Zealand mānuka honey and the trusting consumer. John was a diligent, hard-working man who had the vision for the goodness of NZ mānuka honey, for the producer of that honey and for the trusting consumer.

In 2000 John joined the small beekeeper-run Active Manuka Honey Industry Group (AMHIG) and used his project management skillsets to take the group to being the very professional organisation it now is: UMF Honey Association.



John Rawcliffe, 30/4/1961 – 4/12/2025, is remembered as a dedicated champion of the mānuka honey industry for more than two decades across numerous roles.



Throughout the ensuing period of more than 20 years John put his whole heart into establishing and developing the UMFHA and the UMF quality trademark.

John strove to understand mānuka honey from the beekeeper at the point of production, to the researcher exploring its unique qualities and to the trusting consumer in the marketplace.

In 2004 John led the development of the UMFHA website and a brochure telling people worldwide about New Zealand's mānuka honey and telling the consumer how they can be confident they are purchasing mānuka honey that truly has unique qualities.

One of the key achievements of the UMFHA under John's leadership and guidance was the Mānuka Honey Identification Project conducted 2013-2016. This project led to the identification of over 2000 compounds that make up mānuka honey.

John saw the need for protection of the name mānuka honey, for standards and for the enforcement of those standards in order to protect consumers, the producers and the researchers. John saw the UMF quality mark as the consumer's guide and protection and he regularly conducted in-market audits to ensure the consumer was getting honey true-to-label.

We thank you, John, for your continual diligence and hard work for the New Zealand honey industry.

VICTOR GOLDSMITH, MĀNUKA CHARITABLE TRUST CHAIRPERSON

From the Mānuka Charitable Trust and Te Pitau Limited, we extend our deepest and most heartfelt sympathies to the whānau of John. Our thoughts, prayers, and aroha are with them during this difficult time.

John served with dedication and integrity as the Project Manager for the Te Pitau Trust. He will be remembered not only for his passion and unwavering advocacy for our industry, but also for the warmth, generosity, and friendship he shared with so many.

Haere atu rā, e hoa.

MIKE WEIGHT, FLORENZ CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

I met John on my first official day in the industry while attending a Ministry for Primary Industries function about what was to become the scientific definition for mānuka honey. He was only too happy to give me some context about what it was all about. Over the 10 years that I've been in the industry I always enjoyed talking to John because he cared deeply about its progress and was always happy to talk over things that were happening in a constructive way.

I saw John present many times to a range of people, although sometimes it wasn't 100% clear to the audience exactly what John was trying to help them understand, anyone that saw him speak knew he was highly informed and cared deeply about the subject matter!

His positive energy will be missed.

PHIL CASKEY, NEW ZEALAND MĀNUKA GROUP

I first started working with John in the late 1990s when we did some work on propolis products and later that relationship carried through into work we did together in the early days of establishing the protocols around the UMF brand. I did find an old 1999 fax on some work we did together when he was with Nutra-Zeal.

John was always a strong advocate for seeing the UMF brand as a globally recognised quality mark and worked diligently on that ethos throughout his time with UMF. We led UMF into China together in 2012 and established the first Chinese language UMF licence with Chinese pharmaceutical company Tong Ren Tang.

My wife Sharan and I extend our kindest and warmest regards to his family. His determination was strong and his voice for the mānuka industry loud.

DR ADRIAN CHARLTON, FERA SCIENCE (YORK, ENGLAND) PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST

John Rawcliffe was a respected professional in the mānuka honey industry and a tireless advocate for scientific integrity, consumer protection, and international collaboration in honey authentication. His work and influence extended across industry, academia, and regulatory communities, where he was widely regarded for his commitment, expertise, and principled approach.

I had the privilege of working with John for more than 15 years, during which time our professional collaboration developed into a close personal friendship. Among his most significant contributions was his involvement in the Manuka ID project, including the associated science symposium in Auckland, which he kindly invited me to speak at, and the collaborative work undertaken with Fera. Through these initiatives, John helped to strengthen the scientific foundations for mānuka honey identification and authentication.

John had a substantial impact on the international scientific community, where he played a key role in raising awareness of the challenges surrounding mānuka honey authenticity and in building support for rigorous, evidence-based approaches. He was an effective communicator and a persuasive advocate, bringing together scientists, regulators, and industry stakeholders around a shared commitment to quality and transparency.

In the United Kingdom, John was a passionate champion of consumer rights. He worked persistently to promote wider recognition of UMF as an independent standard capable of providing consumers and retailers with confidence in the quality and authenticity of mānuka honey. His efforts reflected a deep sense of responsibility to both the scientific community and the public.

Beyond his professional achievements, John was known for his warmth, humour, and wide-ranging interests. He was an enthusiastic follower of cricket, rugby, and football, and he never failed to send a message when Liverpool had won! He also enjoyed classic rock music and took pleasure in discussing favourite bands and albums. He created lasting memories for those around him, whether showing visitors around his country with pride or during his many visits to York, where his curiosity and good humour were always appreciated. Among many shared moments was his bemused observation of England's unexpected defeat to Iceland in a major football tournament, which he recalled with characteristic wry amusement.

John will be remembered as a dedicated professional, a principled advocate, and a loyal friend. His contributions to the field of mānuka honey and his commitment to scientific integrity and consumer protection will have a lasting impact. He will be deeply missed by colleagues, family and friends, and all who had the privilege of knowing him. 🐝

NZBB Extension on the Backburner



After kicking the tires with beekeepers regarding the possibility of extending New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity's (NZBB) work programme beyond American foulbrood (AFB) and to a role more fitting their new name, the former American foulbrood (AFB) Management Agency has handed the hot-potato to the Minister for Biosecurity.

Where has Minister Andrew Hoggard got to with it? Well, it is perhaps unsurprising that he has bigger fish to fry at present, with the ongoing yellow-legged hornet incursion response in Auckland, plus a Queensland fruit fly find in early January, adding to the workload.

"At the moment I am prioritising our response to the yellow legged-hornet incursion, but I will come back to NZBB in due course," Hoggard has said in a statement.

"I'd also like to thank beekeeping organisations and beekeepers across the country for their positive engagement and help in the response."


Beekeeper engagement might be praised in the hornet response, but it was very low to NZBB's consultation survey in September and October. Only 115 – and just 20 who own more than 250 hives – completed the biosecurity section of the survey, sent out with AFB levy-rate consultation via email to most and post to some. The three questions were intended to gain an understanding of beekeepers' position on whether NZBB took a wider leadership role on biosecurity to the industry, beyond its current AFB-only mandate.



Addressing the role of NZ Bee Health and Biosecurity is not top of Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard's work programme he has said.

Hoggard made no comment on the low response rate, but said NZBB has presented him with "several options".

"I've asked my officials to provide me with some advice on a preferred way forward. Whatever that looks like, I will have to be confident the support from the sector is there," he said.

How that would be achieved, and when, was not elaborated on. 

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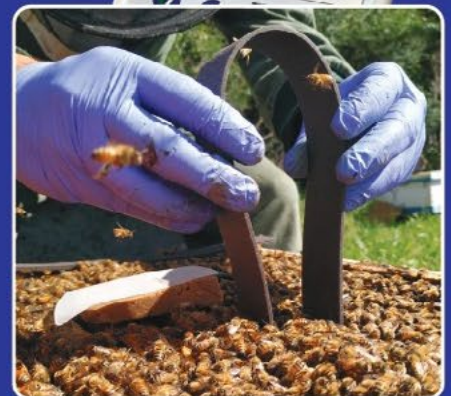


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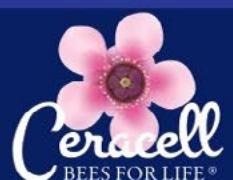


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Protecting New Zealand Bees – Vigilance, Surveillance, and Why Beekeepers Matter



A Tasman based hobby beekeeper, Ilona Hart has worked in apiculture for many years and now leads delivery of the Ministry for Primary Industries' National Apiculture Surveillance Programme (NASP) throughASUREQuality Limited. We sit down with Hart to find out how the programme is working to protect beekeepers' livelihoods, and where they might cross paths with her and her team of beekeepers.

Apiarist's Advocate: Ilona, we first met you in 2021 (*Ilona Hart, Kaitiaki Kai, Food Guardian*), but your role has shifted since then — can you start by explaining what you're doing now?

Ilona Hart: One of my responsibilities is leading the operational delivery of the NASP, a role I've held since late 2024. At its core, NASP, together with beekeepers monitoring and reporting on anything unusual or unexpected, gives New Zealand the best possible chance of detecting an exotic honey bee pest or disease early — early enough that eradication is still a realistic option. It also plays an important role in supporting our market access by underpinning New Zealand's claims about what we *don't* have.

An important part of my role is working across the apiculture industry, beekeepers and MPI to ensure the NASP is delivered in a

way that works as well as it can for everyone and provides critical information about exotic pests and diseases.

AA: Surveillance can sound quite abstract. What does it actually involve?

IH: At its simplest: hive inspections and laboratory testing. But there are two distinct parts to how NASP works.

The first is high risk zone surveillance. There are 19 designated high risk zones around the country — places like ports, airports, transitional facilities, major towns, and high traffic tourist areas. These zones are reviewed annually using information about import pathways, movement patterns, and risks relevant to beekeeping.

Within those zones, authorised inspectors — experienced beekeepers trained and warranted by MPI — inspect selected apiaries under ASUREQuality oversight. They're looking carefully at hive condition and collect standardised samples of adult bees and sticky boards which are then analysed by MPI laboratories for signs of exotic pests or diseases.

AA: So the focus is mainly around ports and cities?

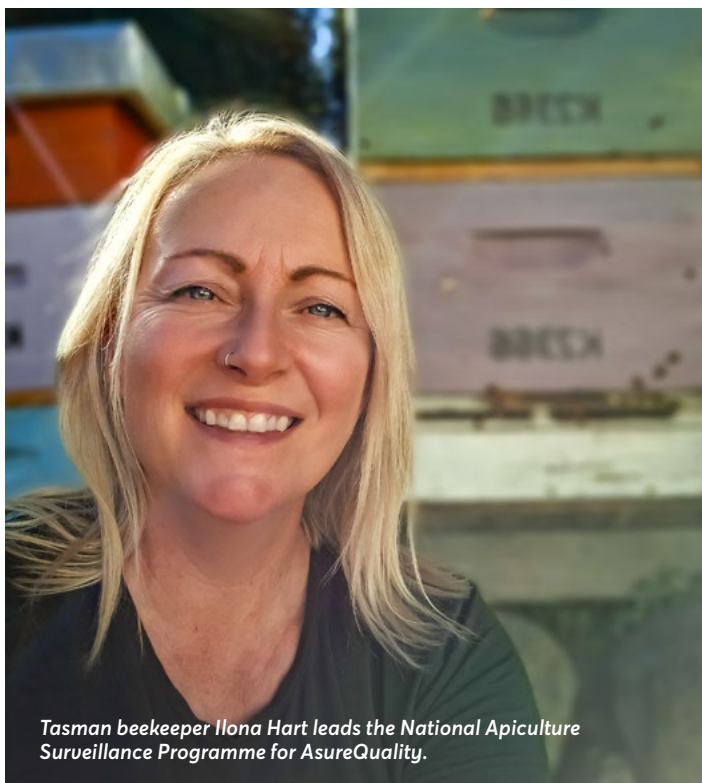
IH: That's where the risk pathways are concentrated, but it's only half the story.

The second part of the programme is low risk apiary screening, which is done in collaboration with live bee exporters. Each season, adult bee samples are submitted from hundreds of apiaries supplying the export trade and are laboratory screened. That broadens coverage significantly and increases the overall sensitivity of the programme.

Together, those two components give us surveillance across both high risk entry points and widely distributed production systems. But even with all that, formal surveillance is only part of our biosecurity system.

AA: What makes beekeeper involvement so critical?

IH: Our inspectors play a critical role, but they aren't the only ones keeping watch. Beekeepers are in their hives far more often, and that day to day familiarity means they're often the first to notice when something feels "off" — behaviour, brood pattern, timing, or anything outside the norm.



Tasman beekeeper Ilona Hart leads the National Apiculture Surveillance Programme for ASUREQuality.

AFB inspectors, although operating under separate warrants, also spend time in colonies and can occasionally identify anything that appears unusual.

These combined observations add value to New Zealand's surveillance system.

If a beekeeper does spot something unusual, a quick call to the MPI Biosecurity Hotline (0800 80 99 66) gets the right response underway fast.

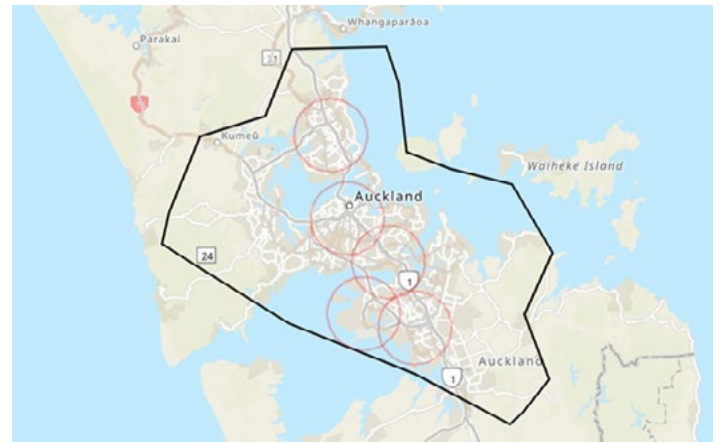
We also rely on beekeepers supporting access to their hives for inspection and sampling for NASP.

AA: What are the key threats you're watching for?

IH: We're looking for a range of exotic pests and diseases that are classified as notifiable under New Zealand's biosecurity legislation. These include small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*), Asian honey bee mites such as *Tropilaelaps* species, tracheal mite (*Acarapis woodi*), European foulbrood (*Melissococcus plutonius*), the parasitic fly (*Braula coeca*), and exotic varroa species.

We also look for exotic honey bee species and subspecies — any bees not currently present in New Zealand. These include African honey bees (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) and their hybrids or 'Africanised' bees, the Cape honey bee (*Apis mellifera capensis*), and the Asian honey bee (*Apis cerana*). Exotic bee species are a concern not only because of their behaviour and impact, but because they can also carry pests and diseases that pose a risk to both the apiculture industry and the wider environment.

Many of the organisms we're watching for have caused serious economic and ecological damage in countries where they've



Auckland's designated high risk surveillance zone (one of 19 nationwide), outlined in black. Elevated risk areas are shown in pink. NASP targets apiaries within both the wider boundary and the elevated risk circles.

become established. New Zealand's freedom from them remains one of the strongest protections our beekeeping industry has.

AA: If a beekeeper is in a high risk zone, what should they expect?

IH: If an apiary is selected, an inspector will get in touch to arrange a suitable time. We carry out inspections in autumn each year. The inspections follow nationally consistent procedures, and beekeepers are welcome to be present if they wish.

All samples go to MPI laboratories, and all results and inspection information are treated confidentially. Beekeepers are only contacted directly if something of concern is found, and MPI leads any follow up investigation.

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AA: Can you talk me through the procedures a bit? What will the inspectors do in the hives?

IH: Every hive in the selected apiary will be inspected following standard procedures:

- Sticky board deployment – A sticky board is inserted on the base of each hive, and miticide strips are applied for approximately 24 hours to induce mite drop and enable detection of external mites.
- Bee sampling – Adult bee samples are collected for laboratory testing, including tracheal mite detection.
- Visual checks – Inspectors examine brood frames and hive interiors for clinical signs of exotic pests and diseases.
- Documentation – Any abnormal signs observed at colony or apiary level are recorded for follow-up.

AA: What does 'follow-up' entail?

IH: If something looks suspicious a sample of the suspect pest or disease will be collected if appropriate and sent to the lab as well. The hive will then be reassembled and marked for potential further investigation. If there are positive results or further information is required, MPI will launch an exotic pest or disease investigation.

You will only be notified of test results if they are positive or further investigation is required.

AA: Some beekeepers are wary of inspections. How is the programme usually received?

IH: For the most part, very well. Having an experienced beekeeper

look through your hives can be a useful learning opportunity, particularly for recognising pests and diseases we don't have here yet.

It's also important to stress that this programme is voluntary. NASP relies on participation and trust to work. Voluntary systems only work when people believe their contribution genuinely matters.

AA: What's the takeaway you'd like readers to sit with?

IH: Our hives aren't isolated from one another. Bees move across properties and regions, and a naïve population would feel the impact of an exotic incursion very quickly.

Surveillance programmes help, but they can't replace observant, engaged beekeepers. Taking the time to look closely, asking questions when something feels off, and reporting concerns early protects not just individual operations, but the wider industry and New Zealand's trade position.

Further information:

- <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/how-to-find-report-and-prevent-pests-and-diseases/bee-biosecurity/bee-pests-and-diseases>
- <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/50077-Unwanted-bee-species-various-Fact-sheet>

And if you have any questions at all about the NASP, get in touch:
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A Pain in the Back – Kiwi Beekeepers’ Relationship with Injury



Anybody who has spent any length of time as a commercial beekeeper in New Zealand will know of back injury, either from first-hand experience or hearing the stories. Now, in a New Zealand first, Victoria University of Wellington PhD student Jane Pierce has researched the impact of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) on Kiwi apiarists.

Critical findings from the study, which surveyed a “disappointingly low” 73 commercial beekeepers, were that MSDs were “widespread” among apiarists and diagnosis and treatment was lacking, contributing to longer-term pain and impairment.

“Agricultural workers seem to tolerate musculoskeletal disorders and expect them,” Pierce says.

“That might be part of the independent farmer type personality, or it might be due to barriers to access to treatment, such as time and cost.”

While research into MSDs among agriculture workers is abundant, Pierce is seeking to better understand the nature of Kiwi beekeepers’ relationship to their work and any lasting damage to their person. Her interest was first piqued around 10 years ago when the qualified physiotherapist was working in occupational health and encountered a beekeeper client.

“I was super interested as there was so little information about musculoskeletal disorders among apiarists or beekeepers, at that stage anyway. Now there are about 12 articles, but mostly from Turkey and Iran. Hence this was a ‘white space’ for study,” she says.

Pierce, in the final of her PhD, believes her article, *Do Beekeepers Have a Sweet Life? Work Related Musculoskeletal Disorders and Their Impact Among Apiarists in New Zealand*, published in the Journal of

Agromedicine in November last year, was the first published article about apiarists and MSDs from the global south.

“Agriculture often gets lumped in one basket and even worse with forestry and/or fishing, but there are huge differences between these sectors,” Pierce says.

Participants to the study had managed more than 250 beehives for at least three years and were at least 18 years-old. The 64 male and nine female contributors were provided a questionnaire to complete.

Eighty-nine percent of the beekeepers reported suffering a MSD in the past 12 months, which is in line with agricultural workers in general. The most common area for disorders was in the lower back, where 74% said they had experienced discomfort, followed by the shoulders, 56%, and ‘neck and head’, 55%.

The reasons for the discomfort were given as ‘physical factors’ by 69% of responders, who suggested awkward and prolonged postures, heavy lifting, repetition and use of force contributed to their discomfort.

It is one thing to know why an injury might be occurring, but coming up with practical solutions can be challenging.

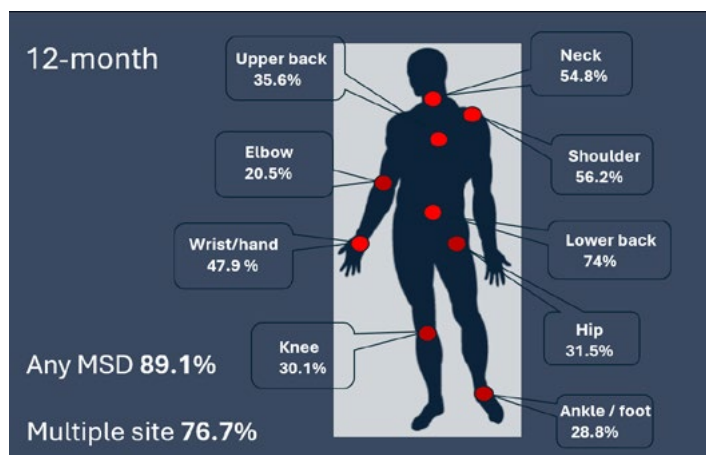
“The management is ‘eliminate’, ‘isolate’ or ‘minimise’. When it comes to beekeeping, some things can be minimised, such as by using hive lifts or hive stands, but not eliminated. I did talk to one apiarist who had reduced his hive numbers and concentrated on quality and still got as much honey as when he had more hives,” Pierce says.

Despite the prevalence of working in pain, the vast majority of beekeepers reported their general health as either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

Only nine of 42 participants that reported “chronic” MSD (lasting more than 3 months) had attended a registered treatment provider. Furthermore, only a third of those who had reported suffering MSDs in the last seven days were receiving treatment.

“While apiarists may be aware that they have musculoskeletal discomfort, there is a whole world out there who have no idea,” Pierce says.

“I did a conference presentation in October in Christchurch and only two people had any idea what beekeeping involved. So this information is useful for treatment providers, for comparisons with other studies from other countries, for researchers, for innovators and for apiarists who will know that they are not alone in their discomfort.” 🐝



A new study has identified the pain points for Kiwi beekeepers, with 74% of those surveyed saying they had experienced lower back discomfort at some point in the last 12 months.

Trading Places – Codex Alimentarius Explained



It's a big word, from an ancient language, but if you have ever traded honey, or any food, then you will have likely encountered *Codex Alimentarius*. The international food standards play an integral role in how honey is traded globally – and even what is deemed 'honey'. What's the point of it though, and is it doing its job sufficiently?

BY DAVE BLACK

For thousands of years bees of various kinds have been kept (or hunted) for honey. The business of apiculture provides employment and incomes in anything from multinational corporations to family enterprises, or it may form part of indigenous subsistence communities' livelihoods, but what makes apiculture more than a purely personal endeavour is the social phenomena we call 'trade'. Otherwise, you've just got pets.

Ancient records document a trade in honey recorded as payments in taxes, duties, and tolls in various parts of the world for at least the last 4000 years, and from these earliest times regulations or standards were established to try and ensure the exchange could be conducted without the market being ruined by fraud. A sustainable market relies on agreement about what things are and therefore what their value might be. Economists will talk about

'perfect' information, or at least, no 'hidden' information, as one of the defining characteristics of a properly functioning market.

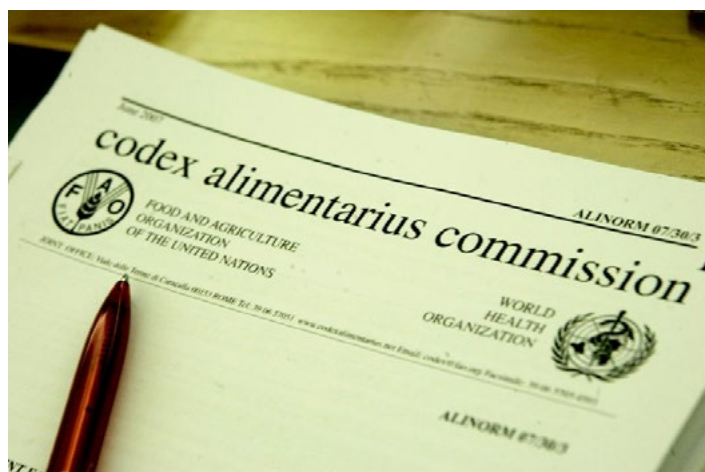
For us in the 21st century that agreement is recorded as the '*Codex Alimentarius*', although you may not see it referred to as such. The name is Latin; a *codex* is just a set of rules or standards, and *alimentarius* are things we eat, so the *Codex Alimentarius* is simply the 'Food Standards' for trading in food, all food, including honey. The historical origin of this Codex can be traced back to the *Codex Alimentarius Austriacus*, a collection of standards and product descriptions for a large number of foods created in Europe by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of the 19th century. In the late 1950s the Austrian Codex was developed into a pan-European *Codex Alimentarius Europaeus*.

UNITING NATIONS

After the end of the second world war most nations recognised that one of the drivers of the reconstruction and future world security was the interdependency of international trade, particularly for food. Following the Allied nations 'Four Powers' declaration (US, UK, China & the Soviet Union) that established the United Nations, in 1943 USA's President Roosevelt convened the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) founding conference in Hot Springs, Virginia. There, representatives of 34 countries set out a programme to free the world from hunger and malnutrition.

The FAO was formally established in 1945 and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948, and both organisations by 1950 had realised that the food regulations in individual countries were often conflicting and contradictory and sometimes lacked a scientific basis. This undermined their goal of improving the global trade of agricultural commodities that was essential to the post-war reconstruction and world food security, so it became self-evident that these important standards were harmonised.

In 1961 The council of the *Codex Alimentarius Europaeus* adopted a resolution proposing that its work on food standards be taken over by the FAO and the WHO and the 11th FAO Conference established



'Perfect' information is what economists say is essential for a properly functioning market. Codex Alimentarius is the code of standards and guidelines which aims to deliver that information globally for honey, and food generally.

the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) as a joint FAO/WHO structure to do exactly that, creating the *Codex Alimentarius* itself in 1962. The CAC has 188 Member Countries—any UN country can join the CAC merely by notifying their intent to do so. There is also one Member Organisation (the European Union), and more than 243 Observers (intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies) who are not members but may contribute too. For example, New Zealand is a 'member'; Apimondia is an 'observer' (but not the only apicultural observer).

ENCODING A FUTURE

The Codex standards have become influential far beyond their original scope, serving as benchmarks for resolving international trade disputes and helping countries form workable national food safety legislation, and much of that strength comes from their inclusivity. For international trade and the World Trade Organisation both Sanitary/Phytosanitary Standards Agreements and the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreements recognise the international importance of the Codex standards in order to prevent unilateral sanitary, phytosanitary and other technical standards becoming unjustified obstacles to trade. But, the problem with becoming an essential standard is that, well, you become essential.

The Commission, and the Codex, are of course a 'work in progress' and always will be, and this is certainly true for the Honey Codex. The standard for honey, CXS 12-1981, was adopted

in 1981 and last amended in 2022. The intention is that an international 'codex' standard, when it exists, will form the basis of, if not supplant, individual national legislation (but keep in mind English is not the world's only language). At a minimum, national regulations certainly should not contradict the message of the Codex.

For honey, the 'international definition (from the Codex) reads [with my emphasis], "*Honey is the natural sweet substance produced by honey bees from the **nectar of plants** or from secretions of living parts of plants or excretions of plant sucking insects on the living parts of plants, which the bees collect, transform by combining with specific substances of their own, **deposit, dehydrate**, store and leave in the honey comb to ripen and mature.*" If what you have is not exactly this, the trading world is not obliged to accept it as honey.

The 'local' FSANZ definition that carries the legal force here and in Australia reads, "*honey means the natural sweet substance produced by honey bees from the **nectar of blossoms** or from secretions of living parts of plants or excretions of plant sucking insects on the living parts of plants, which honey bees collect, transform and combine with specific substances of their own, store and leave in the honey comb to ripen and mature.*" Substantially the same. If you want to sell something called 'Honey' it must meet this definition.

While we often dream otherwise, apiculture is not just about managing honey from European honey bees. In other parts of the world there are other apis bees too, and even other bees (non-apis) that are used in the 'culture' of agricultural and apicultural

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products just as apis bees are; honey, pollen, and wax don't just come from European honey bees. It's also possible that these goods are being 'cultured' by, and harvested from, unmanaged bees.

The case of our Australian neighbour reveals both the International Honey Commission, (IHC) origins of the Codex measurements (it's really the European Honey Commission!), and the 'still-work-to-do' nature of the Code, which requires, for one thing, that 'honey' comes from 'honey bees'. Which species of honey bee? Only *Apis* 'honey' bees? Only *A. mellifera*? Many countries that trade honey from other *Apis* and non-*apis* bees (like Australia's native stingless bees) reasonably want the standard amended to facilitate that market². Brazil (2014), Malaysia (2017³), Tanzania (2017), Indonesia (2018), Argentina, (2019), East Africa, (Ethiopia, and Uganda, 2020), Kenya (2021) and Australia, (2024⁴) have passed their own local measures to govern the trade in stingless bee honey. 'What about us?' is the cry.

Everyone has a 'special' case. It's not just the bees. While the CAC wrestles with honey adulteration and problems defining unifloral and botanical/geographical abound,⁵ heather honey (a European staple) has provision for a special 'tolerance' for high moisture (23%) in the Codex (if it's from *Calluna* plants, but not *Erica*!), but no other honey, regardless of bee or plant can contain more than 20% (New Zealand and Australia's standard says 21%). Ten specific honeys are allowed a higher sucrose content; no New Zealand honey has made the list. And don't mention the labels.

Keeping up with trade descriptions and the required labelling information for an international market is a never-ending task.

The idea that commerce is supposed to be busy preventing world war might take some getting used to nowadays, but certainly global trade evolves much more quickly than global diplomacy. No wonder beekeepers like to stick their head into some hives and 'get away from it all'.

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](#). 🐝

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Moving Beehives and Honeybee Behaviour



If you are a beekeeper you will have invariably moved hives to a different location, and for most commercial beekeepers it is an essential part of the business. Dr Mark Goodwin has too, and makes some astute observations about the resulting bee behaviour.

BY MARK GOODWIN

We have all shifted hives but may be unaware of the effect it has on honeybee behaviour.

I was watching the entrance of an observation hive from dark on a cool morning. It was not warm enough for bees to start flying from their hive, even when the sun came up. I was therefore astonished to see a steady stream of bees entering the hive.

These bees must have been caught out by sunset the previous day. I assume that they stayed overnight in flowers but must have

been in locations where they got enough direct sunlight to be warm enough to be able to fly early in the morning.

I have seen both bumblebees and honeybees motionless in kiwifruit flowers very early in the morning. There were likely other bees that spent the night in colder conditions that would not have been able to fly until there was an increase in air temperature. It is more likely to occur in the summer where light conditions stop flight activity rather than in the winter when temperature can stop nectar and pollen production before it gets dark enough to stop bees flying.

If you are moving an apiary, it might be worth leaving a weak hive to collect these bees.

TRAVEL ROUTINE

Another observation on moving hives comes from marked bees visiting a feeding station that I had set up. I needed bees to feed off a small dish of sugar syrup 1km from their hive. To do this I put a dish of syrup on the flight board. After a few bees fell into the syrup, they started to feed off it. I marked these bees with coloured paint and started to slowly move the dish away from the hive. To start with I could only move it a centimetre at a time so the returning bees would be able to find it again.

Interestingly, the bees became use to the dish moving, so I could increase the distance in each move until I was moving the dish 50m at a time. The bees anticipated each move, so they were waiting at the next 50m mark for me to put the dish down again. Why bees should have the ability to anticipate the moves is unclear as their food sources don't normally move.

I trained these bees from the inner courtyard of the zoology department building at Auckland University, through a breezeway to outside of the building, across the lawns in front of the old Government House building, down Princess Street and onto the roadside curb along Queen Street. The pedestrians on Queen Street didn't notice the brightly coloured bees flying between their legs to get to the sugar syrup!

The next day I had to move the hive to the botanic gardens at Manurewa. The surroundings were paddocks and a few scattered trees. I didn't want to go through the lengthy process of retraining the bees after they started foraging, so I walked out to about a kilometre from the hive in the same bearing that I had trained them to Queen Street. The bees were flying around the spot waiting for me to put the dish down.

I was very surprised that it worked as the paddocks looked nothing like the city canyon that is Queen Street. The marked bees were obviously unaffected by the move and the changed surroundings and just flew the distance and direction they were trained to fly the previous day using their sun compass. This suggests that when you move a hive the foragers will first fly the distance and direction they had been flying before the move. I assume if they don't find the flowers they were looking for, they will fly back to their hives and wait to be recruited to other flowers.

Mark Goodwin is a honey bee scientist and pollination biologist. He set up and led the honeybee research team at Ruakura in Hamilton for 35 years and has vast experience in beekeeping, having given lectures and worked with beekeepers and growers in 19 different countries, written 25 scientific papers, hundreds of technical articles and some of New Zealand beekeeping's most instructive books. 🐝



Moving beehives. Once in a new location, honeybees may default to existing foraging bearings, at least to begin with, observes Dr Mark Goodwin.

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Not For the Weak — 7 Days in the Life of a Beekeeper



While the end of January might have brought Bay of Plenty beekeepers and their livestock a battering by the elements, Aimz kicked off the month and year with back-breaking work in the field, and frustrations in the extraction shed. A mix of joys and trials, here's her look into a week in the life of a beekeeper.

Nothing really prepares you for that first week back in January. Here's mine.

Monday; First day taking honey. We wait for the day to warm up before rocking up to our local sites of odds and sods. We will deal to the light honey before we hit the coast. Lots of smoke, fume boards, and good intentions.

Smaller sites - eight colonies on one, seven single-box hives with queen excluders on another. The last site of 21 hives completes the day. Disease inspecting hives is my job. I feel like I should have put my back brace on earlier, but we are done and dusted and take a nice little haul of bush honey from hives that weren't maybe as strong as others.

Throughout inspections, I notice one or two bees with evidence of mite damage. We are on the ball this year. Mite control has been refreshed; we are taking no chances. If you were reading my stories last year, you would know we had an absolute thrashing by the red devils, so being on top of them now is a beautiful thing.

Tuesday; Starting at the same time, but it's a slightly bigger day. Our crew of three will tackle two sites of twenty-four hives. Now we are seeing a few more bees, and most hives are grunty and doing well. Failing queens are marked on their lids for autumn requeens, along with anything else of note.

On return, the honey boxes are stacked in the warm room with yesterday's booty. After unloading the truck I'm glad I kept my back brace on, I'm starting to feel the repercussions of being bent like a staple all day. Today's tool-time with some icy watermelon and a cold drink couldn't come sooner.

Wednesday; Looking after the old man's babies, we take the honey off our double three-quarter site. Dad's own queens, and the first site to be split and put to use as autumn queen raisers. There are only 32 hives, but halfway through I'm feeling it. The bees are a bit stropky, and I get more stings than in past months combined.

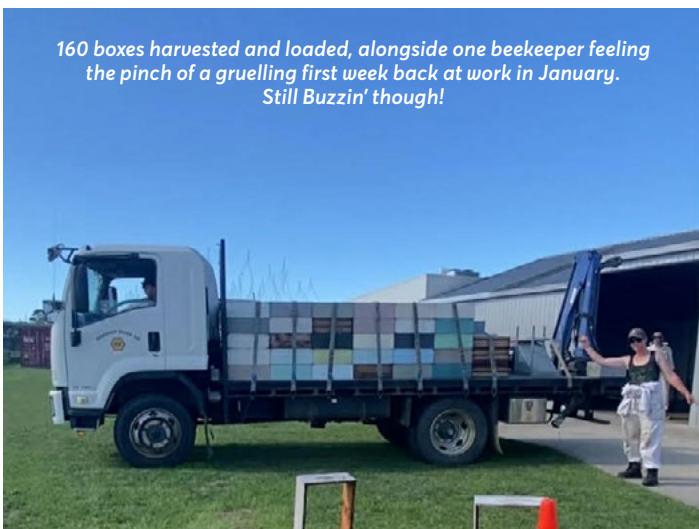
I'm struggling to keep anywhere near the blower today – I should know what it's like, this was my job last year, but it's all feeling pretty fresh. Riding home with the boys, my back is telling me it's already been a big week, and at the shed I mentally prepare myself just to get out of the truck. The pain is real. Truck is unloaded and we all go home. I am unusually docile. There is no fight left in me.

Thursday; Only the thought of having a helper gets me out of bed today. An earlier start sees us travelling inland to our targeted light honey spots. Boxes stacked, another two sites of twenty-four.

Other locations record temperatures in the 30s, but it's cooler out in the bush, in the middle of nowhere. The humidity is up though, and my head is down. Inside my veil the sweat drips off my chin anyway. It's just another day.

Although my helper didn't feel like he was doing much, he was. My substitute crane, every box of brood he lifted was one I didn't have to. For once I found myself waiting on the blower. Washing up in a crisp flowing mountain stream was the icing on the cake. At home, 160 boxes of crystalline bush honey are stacked outside the extracting room door.

160 boxes harvested and loaded, alongside one beekeeper feeling the pinch of a gruelling first week back at work in January. Still Buzzin' though!





Friday; Harvesting the rest of our local honey. The last push for the week. Our team of three heads out early to beat the heat. Wineberries and blackberries line the road, and the first of them are already ripe. On site, I feel like I am on a go slow, but then everyone else must be too. Bring on the weekend.

11am, job done, another twenty-four hives down. Our driver pulls up by the wineberry patch, and a few tasty handfuls of berries are just a teaser of what's to come.

We get back to the shed, and after unloading the crop, and inhaling a sandwich, it's time to get serious. Into the plant. Double checking everything, for today is the day we kick it in the guts.

This is a test run for next week. Our main man is taking a convenient holiday, and I will be overseeing extracting operations. For now we put through 40 boxes.

I'm working the extractor. I don't really want to lift another honey box this week. We're halfway through, and the number of jam-ups through the conveyor is more than annoying, it's an issue we're going to have to deal with. A quick phone call to the manufacturer, and before you can say Boutelje, Peter has picked that prickly problem with the pricker clamp, and we are back in business.

Agreed, this is the best honey of the season. Light, juicy... towai, rata, and blackberry. I want to drink it by the cupful.

Saturday/Sunday; While chilling in my hammock with the kids, I'm still seeing brood, but after a beach mission; kayaks, fish, and good feels, I've kicked back into being Mum. I appreciate the time – because it's starting to feel awfully familiar.

No two weeks are the same. Extracting is next on the cards, and we'll be splitting hives in-between. After that, we tackle our manuka sites, extract all over again, and then bring our bees home for wintering.

Time is of the essence, but we can only do what we can do. Tomorrow is another day.

Aimz.



Sun beating down, honey stacked high – I'm glad I had my helper doing some of the heavy lifting as I inspected brood this day of the rata/towai harvest.

Aimz is a second-generation commercial beekeeper in the Bay of Plenty who took up the hive-tool fulltime at the end of the 2024 honey season. Formerly a stay-at-home mum to four kids, she has now found her footing in the family business. 🐝



Gearing up for the first mānuka honey harvest of 2026.

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If Not Nostalgia, Then What?



The world's rules-based order has been disrupted. Ian Fletcher surveys the new geopolitical playing field and explores New Zealand's, limited, options.

BY IAN FLETCHER

The past ten days has seen a lot of commentary about Mark Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum meeting in Switzerland on January 20. Carney is the Prime Minister of Canada. His speech was a reaction to what he called the "rupture" in the world order as Trumpian America has become more feral, more obviously self-serving, and has deliberately disrupted the rules-based order that the US had established and sustained since the end of WW2.

Carney argued that "middle powers" (big countries smaller than the US and China) should face facts, and come together to organise their affairs through enlightened cooperation. He ended with the observation that there was no going back: "Nostalgia is not a policy".



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney says there is a "rupture" to the world order – so where does that leave New Zealand?
Photo: Policy Exchange, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

What about New Zealand? There's no doubt that we have been huge beneficiaries of the post-WW2 order. We have enjoyed peace and security in the shadow of the US and Australia. We have gained from gradually improving market access in recent decades. We have been able to trade and finance ourselves through a financial system that had the US dollar at its heart. Risks have been few, costs have been small and the benefits have been great.

Is it all over, as Carney claims: is it a real 'rupture' in the global order? His argument is that the rules-based order that we have supported over the past 80 years was actually dependent on overwhelming US military and financial power, ensuring order and (selectively) punishing those who broke the rules. Now that the US is saying that it only cares for its own narrow self-interest, this system is exposed as one based on power, not principle. The principles remain, but they are empty words without force behind them.

I find this analysis persuasive – I think the US gained immensely from its former position as an 'enlightened' superpower, but having turned away from that role it won't easily be able to regain the trust of its former allies. It's clear that the US now feels weaker than it did, and this abandonment of its global role is a mark of relative weakness and of psychological retreat.

But it leaves a mess behind. Countries like Australia, Canada, the UK, New Zealand and much of Europe now find ourselves still



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dependent on the US for a lot of intelligence and logistics related to defence. But it's now both unreliable and shockingly expensive to replace. So, there is a quietly desperate scramble going on to both appease the US (to buy time), and to find affordable alternatives. Carney's call for middle power cooperation reflects this dilemma.

Where does that leave New Zealand? We can see the appeasement process at work: Winston Peters (as Foreign Minister) has taken the management of the relationship with the US as a priority. We tolerated the imposition of US tariffs last year with scarcely a murmur. When Anna Breman, the new Reserve Bank Governor, joined other central bank heads criticising the US administration for its judicial persecution of the Chair of the Federal Reserve, Winston Peters delivered her a public dressing down.

Appeasement makes sense. There's no point picking a fight we can only lose. It's not in New Zealand's interest to draw attention to ourselves in a context where the US would almost certainly be less tolerant than in the past. Public moralising will aggravate the relationship, and expose New Zealand to actual harm. So, Winston is probably right so far. He's buying time, ensuring "every decision and *anything we say* advances the collective interest of the New Zealand people" [his words; my emphasis].

But what about the future? There are two broad choices we face. The first is nostalgia. We can hope Carney is wrong, that Trump goes away and the old order is put back in place. This might happen. But even if it does, Carney's truth remains: the post-war system was based on a fiction, that the rules-based order existed independently of US power. We all now know that's not true. We are in a world that's much harsher and less predictable than we thought.

The other choice is to plan for a less ordered world. We can – as we have in the past – cosy up to Australia, and shelter behind them. That makes us dependent, more or less as we are now. It wouldn't be too bad, although we would need to accept the gradual loss of autonomy that would follow. We would really become "a non-voting state of Australia" as one New Zealand official once described it. Given our history, this is the easy choice and it's probably the choice we will make. We end up like Ireland – nice, but irrelevant except as a backdoor to somewhere more important. If we were honest with ourselves, we should consider actual federation with Australia.

Or, if that seems too much, we could take a bit more responsibility, and invest more in our own security and independence – other countries our size can do that, and prosper (think Finland, or Singapore). That would be expensive and involve a big commitment by the whole country. But it would buy us some genuine independence and some bargaining power.

There remains one big uncertainty for New Zealand: the future of the world's trading and financial systems. The World Trade Organization's multilateralism and predictable dispute settlement system is struggling, and we must expect to have to do a lot more bilateral market access – which will not suit us as much, but it'll be what we're stuck with. And it's not clear how the world's financial system will change, although no one is yet seriously betting against the dollar. Again, Australia beckons.

Where does that leave us? We used to claim we had an independent foreign policy, but it was all under the shelter of the US and its allies: really, independent opinions without costs or

consequences. Now we may find we really do have an independent policy, but that we have to bear the costs. Australia looms, whatever way we look.

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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