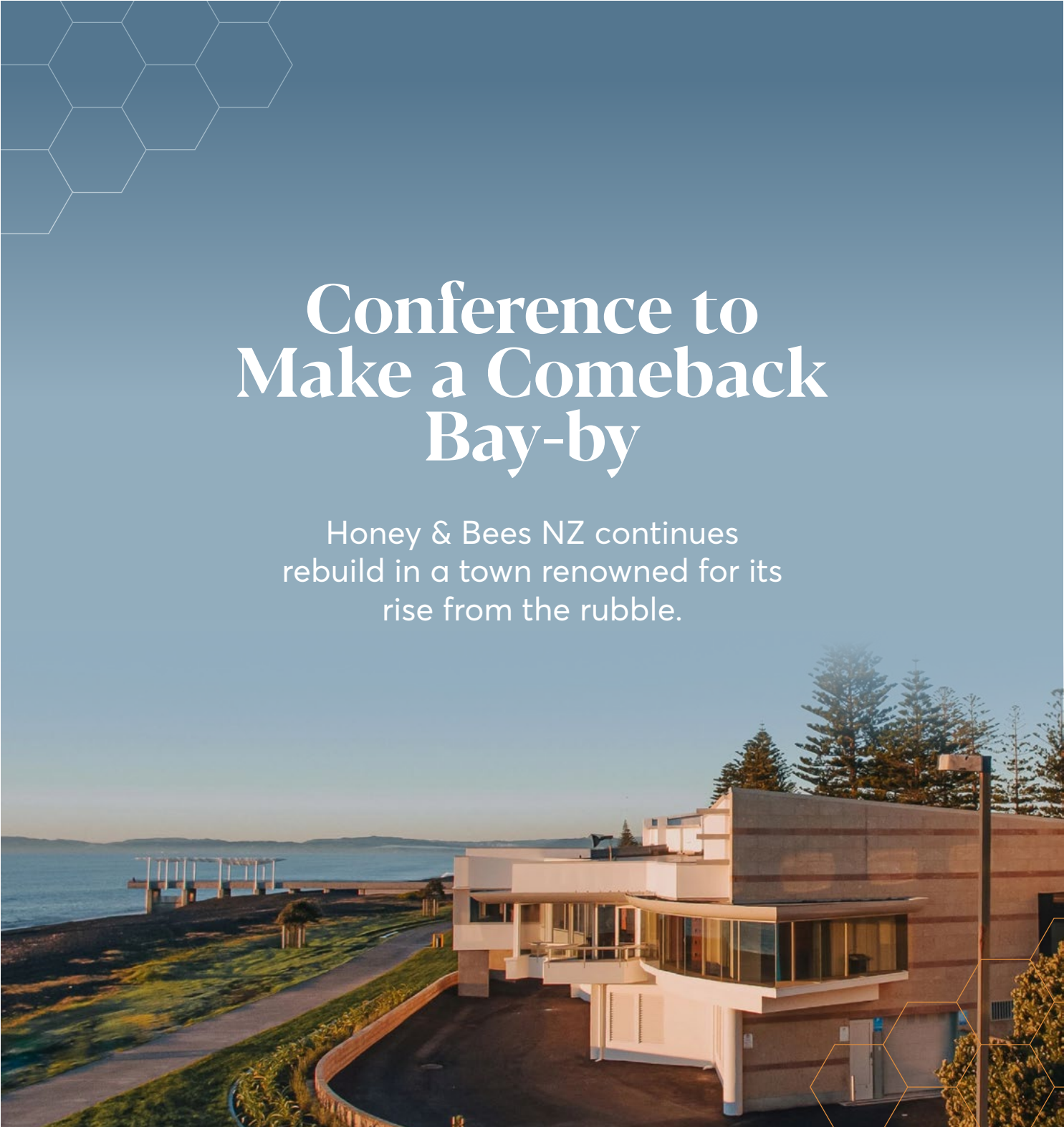


ISSUE 86, SEPTEMBER 2026

APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



Conference to Make a Comeback Bay-by

Honey & Bees NZ continues
rebuild in a town renowned for its
rise from the rubble.

Honey and Bees NZ Announces Winter 2027 Conference



Honey and Bees New Zealand's (HBNZ) first five weeks of existence have proven active, with a new seven-person board room and chairperson now at the helm overseeing a back-to-basics management team. They have signalled an early win too, with the announcement of plans for a July 15-16 conference in Napier in 2027.

Chairperson Murray Bush made the announcement of a "July" conference in Napier to members via an email on August 27, and has since confirmed it is likely to be a two-day affair in the middle of the month.

Winter conferences were a staple of HBNZ's predecessor Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), and before that the National Beekeepers' Association (NBA), wrapped around their annual general meetings. The Napier War Memorial Centre run by Napier Conference and Events is booked to play host to the inaugural AGM and conference of HBNZ, after ApiNZ members voted to adopt a new constitution to usher in the era of the new group on June 5.

HBNZ board members Barry Hantz and Cameron Martin will head up the organising committee for the conference, and have already been meeting with a group of Hawke's Bay beekeepers, led by Arataki Honey Hawke's Bay assistant general manager Andrew Smith. Bush says while the board had tentatively began discussing the potential for a conference to coincide with their inaugural AGM in a year's time, it was an approach from the informal Hawke's Bay cluster of beekeepers that spurred action and the landing spot of Napier. The city is renowned for a rebuild almost a century ago following a devastating 1931 earthquake, making it a poetically-fitting location for the reconstructed HBNZ.

The directors have already agreed that in 2028 a South Island location will host a similar event.



Located on Marine Parade in Napier, the War Memorial Centre run by Napier Conference and Events will play host to the inaugural HBNZ AGM and conference, July 15-16 2027.

"It is an exciting thing," Bush says of the announcement.

"We needed to put a stake in the ground that we were looking at the future and that is why we have also committed to the 2028 conference being in the South Island. That proves we are a national body and it gives those in the South Island a chance to think about how they wish to be involved."

Other than date and location, details of the conference are few almost a year out, but Bush says his board has a vision for how the AGM at the event will be conducted.

"A balance between the old NBA, which took all day and was terrible, and ApiNZ which was one hour and terrible. A proper AGM," the chairman says.

ROUNDING OUT THE TEAM

After conducting a run-off election to fill the final seat at the inaugural board table, due to an initial tie between Gisborne beekeeper Ben Stewart and Taranaki apiarist Julian McCurdy when voting closed June 24, it was the East Coast nominee who won out. Stewart joins the six fellow directors elected on the first go round – Bush, Hantz, Martin, Peter Bell, Matt Goldsworthy and Jaime McRae.

"It is always hard coming in a week after school starts, but he has slid in smoothly and will be an excellent part of the board," Bush reports of Stewart's addition to their regular online video-call meetings.

Since launch of the new group former New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) advisor Ian Fletcher has been contracted to HBNZ for policy work on an ad-lib basis. They have a two-month agreement, which is set to lapse as the political cycle enters an election and then summer break, but Bush says they intend to use Fletcher's services again in the new year.

"He will be retained long term, but our budget is pretty tight so there will be some months where we won't use Ian very much," the chair says.

Both Bush, Fletcher and McRae who is leading the biosecurity, science and research portfolio for HBNZ, made a trip to Wellington on July 20 to meet Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard and members of the Ministry for Primary Industries, to make HBNZ known to the government.

"His political connections in Wellington are invaluable," Bush says of Fletcher.

"We couldn't have gone to Wellington on the 20th and did what we did without Ian's input, knowledge and contacts. At the

moment, while we try to build bridges as fast as we can, he is an incredibly valuable member of the HBNZ team."

After 10 years of working with NZBI, Fletcher says it would have been "irresponsible" for him to walk away from some of that policy work. He was also instrumental in the consultation process with beekeepers leading to writing of the HBNZ constitution. Now based in the Wairarapa, and thus close to Wellington, Fletcher is at home in the high-level offices of the capital with his CV stacked with leading trade and biosecurity roles based in Europe and Australia plus a stint leading New Zealand's 'spy network', the Government Communications Security Bureau, or 'GCSB'.

"I've got to a point where I realise how important the beekeeping industry is, how misunderstood it is in government and elsewhere ... commercial beekeeping always requires careful explanation and I have a continued contribution to make there," Fletcher says.

HBNZ also employs a part-time administrator, Vida Rye, to round out the team alongside the seven board members and Fletcher's contract work.

FURTHER SUPPORT FROM NZBI

The overarching concept behind ApiNZ's move to HBNZ was "unity" between them and fellow beekeeping group NZBI. While NZBI still has not set a date for an AGM which would give their members the opportunity to vote to disband and thus more completely deliver that unity, they continue to offer encouragement for the new group. NZBI president Jane Lorimer

says such a meeting of their members is just a matter of time.

"Once we get feedback from Honey and Bees NZ we will have an executive meeting, put the steps in place to have an AGM, and it is highly likely the recommendation from the executive will be to wind it up. I can't say more than that though, because it is up to our members to decide," Lorimer says.



Honey and Bees NZ chair Murray Bush says the group has committed to a conference and "proper AGM" in Napier, July 15-16 2027.

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"A lot of our members have signed up with the new organisation, so everything is progressing towards it. We have supported it from day dot."

As well as that transfer of membership – or at least dual membership holdings of some beekeepers between the two groups



ApiNZ conferences drew big crowds of beekeepers and their suppliers, such as this 2021 event in Rotorua. What form a July 2027 HBNZ conference and AGM in Napier takes is still to be determined, but it will align with a quiet time in the hives for most beekeepers.

– Fletcher's transfer of his contracting services to HBNZ and the move of NZBI executive members Martin and McRae to the new group's board table is increasingly making the disbanding of NZBI look like a matter of when, not if.

Bush says he was heartened to head to Wellington on July 20 for his round of meetings with "a letter of support in my back pocket" from NZBI's executive.

"I can't go to Wellington and say I represent the industry if I don't. We still have to go through NZBI's AGM process. I have no problem with that, but having an indication from the executive that HBNZ is the voice of New Zealand beekeeping gives us some clarity and confidence to do what we need to do," Bush says.

NEW WORKING GROUPS

Bush says the full work plan of the first five weeks of existence was hastened by the need to prepare for the Wellington meetings, as well as a fast-approaching inaugural "Bee Alliance" roundtable on September 10 (with that gathering detailed in *MPI's 'Bee Alliance' to Meet in September – Project Leader Explains Rationale*). Focus is now turning to establishing portfolios for board members and under them "external speciality groups" to drive projects.

ApiNZ utilised experts from around the industry in a similar vein through "focus groups" in areas such as standards and compliance, education and science and research. HBNZ has set down five working "banners" thus far – the biosecurity, science and research led by McRae; American foulbrood headed by Bell;

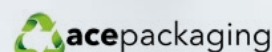
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communications fronted by Goldsworthy; pollination led by Hantz; and Bush leading finance.

"They are nothing new though, they have been in existence in the past. We can't do everything from the board table and some of these groups will just exist for when they are needed," Bush says.

"In some cases they will get filled out very soon, others will take longer. Some are more urgent than others. But we will be going out to the greater community of the industry and saying 'can you help out?'"

That includes both members and non-members of HBNZ the chair explains.

"If people want to put their hand up and make themselves known to the board we can put it into consideration. We won't be appointing everyone to a role, but it is likely there are people out there really keen to help and we don't know them."

BUILDING BRIDGES AND MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

While communication channels have been opened in Wellington – where Bush believes HBNZ was well received – "building bridges" between the new group, which narrowed its voting membership away from honey packers and non-commercial beekeepers by tossing out the ApiNZ constitution for their new set of rules, and some of those former members is a pressing task.

"We are building a gameplan for hobbyists, packers and exporters. We have to focus on commercial beekeeping, but we cannot do it in isolation to hobbyists," Bush says, pointing to MPI's

September 10 Alliance meeting as potentially very helpful in this regard.

The chair also points out that his board wants to encourage communication with the "grassroots" beekeepers of their membership and hopes to soon roll out a "suggestion box" type concept where seconded suggestions are sent to the directors.

"We want to create a pathway where information can come from the floor 52 weeks of the year, rather than just relying on conference. People have been able to do that forever, but many don't know they can. We want to open that pathway as an official channel of information coming to the board," Bush says.

The recently-retired, long time Marlborough beekeeper has busied himself in his new, voluntary role and says he hopes the group is proving to beekeepers that are as yet unaffiliated the value in taking up a membership.

The group reports a "steady" increased in membership with now 176 backers, but of which only 98 are commercial beekeepers and thus full, voting, members.

"There is a lot of opportunity out there for the beekeeping industry to prove its worth and have a different narrative attached to it. It is exciting, it really is, it is up to us and industry to put our hand up and say 'we are serious'," Bush says, adding "after four weeks we can't do everything, but the momentum is strong."

Honey and Bees NZ can be contacted by email, info@honeyandbees.nz and more info on the organisation can be found at www.honeyandbees.nz. 

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Mānuka Trademark 'Likely to Offend Māori': IPONZ Committee



BY BRUCE ROSCOE

The Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand (IPONZ) has notified Mānuka Charitable Trust that its mānuka trademark design “is likely to offend Māori” because it resembles a moko kauae — the traditional Māori tattoo worn by women on their chin.

IPONZ's Māori Trade Marks Advisory Committee's (the Committee) determination that trademark use of the design may offend “a significant section of the community, including Māori” has stood as an objection to Mānuka Charitable Trust's (MCT) mānuka honey certification trademark application for 16 months from 19 February 2025, files released under the Official Information Act reveal.

The Committee, which by law must be consulted on design marks that contain Māori elements, has also raised concern over MCT's attempt to trademark the word “mānuka”, considering that the plant is a taonga (owned) species. Single-entity ownership of a trademark whose “distinctive, dominant element” was the name of a taonga species would “conflict with Māori views of collective ownership”, IPONZ has relayed to MCT.

(This report references several Māori words. Definitions provided by IPONZ are noted in the accompanying graphic. Single-word approximate translations are used after the first usage in our text for ease of understanding. Some Māori words have multiple translation options where none fit perfectly.)

As of this writing, the fate of the committee's objection was unclear. What is certain is that MCT has laid down a challenge to the committee. It seems equally clear that, as two Māori entities

argue the storylines of their distant past, and the Committee feels for the dimensions of MCT's present, the already decade-long mānuka trademark campaign will enter its second decade of complex and costly legal moves to uncertain result.

“The trust is standing strong and is not afraid to go back into those courtrooms and have its say...”, MCT said in response to the committee's objection on 19 February 2026, a year to the day that IPONZ had relayed it to MCT's attorney. IPONZ reported on 6 June 2026 that it awaited a committee decision on whether it would accept MCT's arguments.

THE ORDINARY AND THE SACRED

IPONZ notified MCT of the committee's view that there are “... potential issues around the granting of a right to exclusively use certain elements of Māori culture, as this is generally at odds with the concept of collective ownership and benefit of mātauranga (knowledge) — especially where there is no acknowledgement of Māori origins or sources that are critical to the product or service”.

“The trade mark appears to be a moko kauae. Moko kauae are traditional Māori tattoo worn by women on their chin,” IPONZ relayed. “Traditional Māori art and design form an important part of Māori identity and culture as they communicate a story and have deep meaning, and are therefore considered to be of significance to Māori.

“The Committee is concerned that the use of the moko kauae, in combination with the goods, including foodstuffs, all considered to be noa (ordinary), could convey a contrary message or be a derogatory inference. That is, to associate a device that is tapu (sacred) with goods that are noa signifies an attempt to lift the tapu of moko kauae, and therefore appears offensive.”

Definitions

Kupu: “word, vocabulary, saying, talk, message, statement, utterance, lyric”

Mātauranga: “knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill”

Noa: “to be free from the extensions of tapu, ordinary, unrestricted”

Taonga: “property, goods, possession, effects, object.” (The IPONZ website translates taonga as “treasure”.)

Tapu: “be sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden under atua protection”

Tikanga: “correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol.”

Source: Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand.



The Mānuka Charitable Trust trademark which remains unregistered as a certification trademark in any market.

"NO SINGLE AUTHORITY"

"Taonga species," IPONZ continued in its report on the Committee's opinion, "have cultural references and associated practices for Māori, and are associated with collective ancestry, mātauranga and tikanga (protocol). A trade mark that consists solely of the name of a taonga species will be considered tapu because of this. One trader having exclusive rights in a mark containing the name of a taonga species conflicts with Māori views of collective ownership. There is no single authority who can provide consent for the use of a taonga species in a trade mark. For these reasons, a mark containing the name of a taonga species is likely to be considered offensive to Māori."

SHUNTING THE LOCOMOTIVE

Credentials of the Committee's five advisors include tenure, teaching, or advisory positions with the universities of Auckland, Victoria, and Canterbury. Fields of professional experience include Māori art, architecture, and iconography; business, cultural, and intellectual property rights; data sovereignty; language revitalisation; museology; tikanga and mātauranga awareness; and trademark law.

The advisors are selected for their knowledge of te ao Māori (Māori worldview) and tikanga but their advice ultimately is non-binding as rejection of an application can be appealed to the High Court. Still, IPONZ's registration of a trademark that was proved to offend a "significant section of the community, including Māori" would breach 17(1)(c) of the Trade Mark Act 2002.

MCT filed its trademark application with IPONZ on 11 June 2024. After the passage of two years, the origin and purpose of MCT,

which is called a "trader" by advisors who hold the power to shunt its locomotive onto a siding, seems not understood. The advisors cannot be blamed for stabbing in the dark. MCT maintains a perfunctory signpost-scale website, communicates mainly through Facebook, and last produced a newsletter in April 2021.

The Committee's objection has coaxed out of MCT a story that links a mānuka tree to the moko kauae. This story describes "an elevated platform not far from where tipuna (ancestors) lived..." where "they practiced the art of tā moko by a tree, a mānuka tree..." MCT narrated in its response to the Committee. "That particular tree was utilised to make the ink, the sacred leaves, and to make the cleaning process that would help the moko sit properly inside the chin. When you mix these together, you get this beautiful marking system that came out of the tree, that was embedded into chins, which makes you part and parcel of that tree and that is a tree whakapapa" (line of descent).

To answer the charge that MCT as a single operator could not trademark a taonga, MCT used passive tense. MCT "is the Mānuka Charitable Trust..." and "...has been established to act as kaitaki (guardian) to protect the mana and mauri (vital essence) of mānuka". Established by whom and under what industry and legal conditions is history that remains undisclosed. Neither do the seven "guiding principles" reprinted from the MCT trust deed illuminate origin.

MIXED MESSAGING

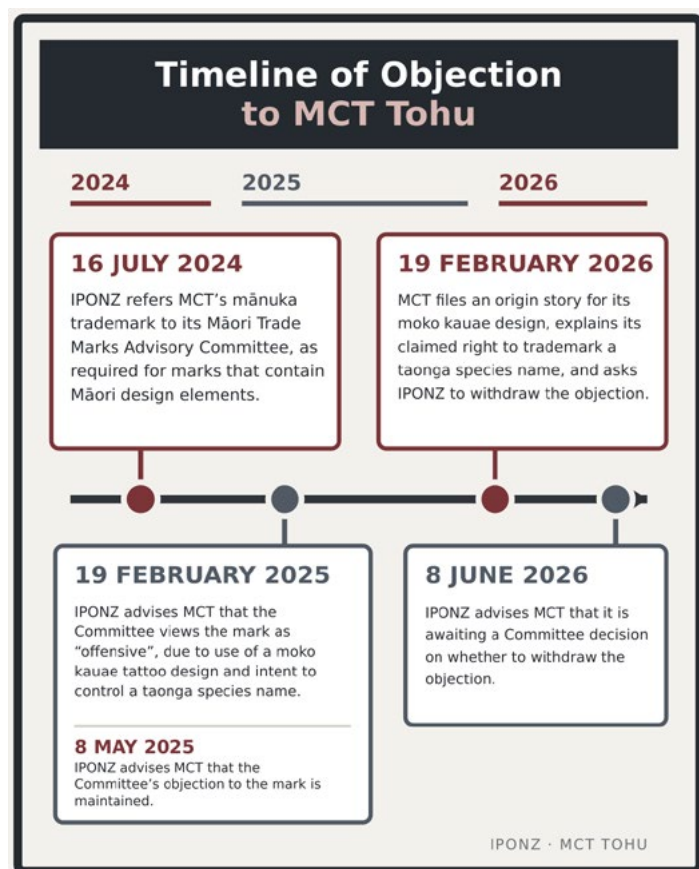
The creator of the MCT design is Sir Derek Lardelli, a celebrated Māori visual artist, graphic designer, master of tā moko (traditional Māori tattooing), composer, and teacher. He was knighted in 2020 for services to Māori art.

On the website of IP Australia, "insect" and "bee" appear as "indexing constituents" of the image in the MCT trademark, which Southern Cross Intellectual Property filed on 17 December 2024.

The tohu in the mark may be chameleon in nature — a moko kauae to the inner circle and the face of a bee to those outside. Ironically, for the apiculture industry, that bee is not the native solitary bee that does not produce honeycomb but the European honeybee that does.

NO TWO WAYS

Before the Committee registered concern over MCT's application for reasons of tikanga, IPONZ had highlighted potential conflict with trademarks that contained the word "manuka" and were



The Mānuka Charitable Trust trademark has been under the cloud of Māori objection since February 2025.



The Māori Trade Marks Advisory Committee of the Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand has identified the design in the Mānuka Charitable Trust tohu (symbol or logo) as a moko kauae, a traditional Māori tattoo worn by women on their chin.

already registered or under examination. "Confusingly similar" — "manuka" in one mark with "manuka" in another! — is grounds for rejection.

MCT is learning it may not be able to have it both ways — the United States Patent and Trademark Office has said it cannot use the words "manuka honey" without disclaiming exclusive right to "manuka", but the tohu is fine. IPONZ's final position on the tohu will remain unclear until the Committee's response to MCT's arguments is known.

Even if the tohu is greenlighted and mark conflicts overcome, the question of whether a taonga species name can become part of a certification trademark that confers the right of control may take an age to answer.

Bruce Roscoe is a Japan-resident researcher and former foreign correspondent and securities analyst. He has studied the mānuka trademark cases since the first filing in New Zealand in August 2015. 🐝

Māori IP

Māori culture and traditional knowledge is a unique New Zealand taonga (treasure) — central to our national identity.

excerpted from the IPONZ website

The Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand salutes Māori intellectual property.

MCT's Response

The Mānuka Charitable Trust has responded to a request for comment on this topic with the following statement, published in full.

"The New Zealand CTM applications remain under examination by IPONZ. While that process is ongoing, it would not be appropriate to comment on individual matters being considered through the examination process. The Trust continues to work through those matters with its advisers and remains focused on achieving registration of the CTMs."



A mānuka tree in full bloom. IPONZ has raised doubt over whether a taonga species such as mānuka can be trademarked. Photo: Phil Bendle

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MPI's 'Bee Alliance' to Meet in September – Project Leader Explains Rationale



It's been in the wings for at least four months as the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has worked behind the scenes meeting with various beekeeping industry groups and stakeholders, and on September 10 the "New Zealand Honey and Bee Alliance" will take flight with an inaugural hui in Wellington.

Apiarist's Advocate first broke news of the potential "alliance" and MPI's approach to numerous apiculture industry groups in May. However, the ministry and project lead Terry Copeland have released only short, undetailed, statements over the intervening months, and only when prompted. Now though, as a first meeting approaches, Copeland has spoken candidly regarding the concept, and how he has emerged as the driving force behind it.

"MPI wants to support the bee and honey sector, but doesn't want to tell it what to do, and nor should it," Copeland says.

"However, I have identified that there is a real opportunity to bring the main players around the same table to determine where the gaps are and how MPI can support the industry to take itself forward. We have no fixed opinion on what that might look like."

Expected to attend the inaugural "alliance" hui – as invited by Copeland – are representatives from Honey and Bees New Zealand; UMF Honey Association; Mānuka Charitable Trust; New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity; as well as Comvita chief executive Karl Gradon, Auckland Beekeepers Club president Ken Brown and New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Inc CEO Colin Bond.



Terry Copeland has been on MPI's payroll for less than a year as programme director export growth, and now expects half his role to be dedicated to being a liaison and 'project manager' for the apiculture industry.

Copeland's job title at MPI is programme director export growth, and going forward he expects about half of his role to be occupied with assisting the apiculture industry.

"So I can be a dedicated person to link the sector together. So the industry knows who they can go to at MPI, whether there is a biosecurity problem, or a food safety problem, and that there is someone on the inside working on behalf of the sector," he explains.

Over the past several months, during discussions with various industry groups and beekeepers, he says he has identified some areas where he believes improvements can be made for the honey and bee industry. Most prominent he believes is a lack of data collection which could assist business decision making; an inconsistent application of biosecurity; the haphazard relationship between beekeepers and the horticulture sector which can see beekeepers bounce focus between honey production and much-needed pollination service offerings; and the challenges of beekeeper/honey packer relationships.

"With all of that, it made me think the best thing we can do – if there is a desire for it – is to bring all the main players around the same table. Including the hort sector who can talk to their pollination needs, including landowners, including iwi ... have some organisations but also have some beekeepers who are living it and breathing it day by day, to see if they can agree as to what will shift the dial," Copeland says.

Once the group determines what might "shift the dial", Copeland says it will be his job to help make the appropriate projects happen.

"MPI doesn't want to be making all the decisions. What we can do, is help bring projects to life."

Likely funding options for such projects will be through MPI itself, along with industry co-funding.

Copeland comes to the role of apiculture industry contact at MPI having been on staff with the ministry for less than a year. Before that he spent seven years as CEO of Federated Farmers, four years in the same position with New Zealand Young Farmers, which followed a career in the wine industry. He says he initially came to the ministry with an eye to assisting growth in the wine industry, but he and director general Ray Smith fast identified the need to focus on apiculture too.

With beekeeping industry representation having been stumbling for years, as Apiculture New Zealand bled money, memberships waned and at several times its directors suggested dissolution before its ultimate morphing to Honey and Bees New Zealand, it

begs the question why, now, has MPI decided to step in and take a greater interest in how such a crucial sector to many primary industries is being led?

Being relatively fresh to his role with MPI himself, Copeland was short on answers there, but admits "it should have happened plenty of time ago, but it is happening now".

Crucial to success of the concept, Copeland believes, will be building trust and strong relationships between the numerous groups inside the "alliance".

"I fully expect this will go from the first meeting to something which will roll out, but I am not being too presumptuous. The group can ultimately make that decision, but MPI wants to work onside with the industry to take this forward," Copeland says.

The inaugural group around the table on September 10 may not be the full alliance into the future, but "we have to kick it off somewhere" Copeland says. On the agenda at that first meeting is determining what each organisation sees as the major challenges they face, and what they believe a successful alliance would look like.

Also, "how can we best communicate what we are doing to the sector" Copeland says. On that note, while the formation of the alliance might have been surrounded in hush from MPI, going forward Copeland says he expects to give regular updates.

"They won't be open meetings, but I want it to be really public," the beekeeping industry's new contact at MPI says.

"Every time something is proposed or achievements or milestones are reached, there will be fresh releases around that." 🐝

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Comvita Achieves Profit Turnaround but Disclosure Worsens

BY BRUCE ROSCOE



Comvita returned to profitability in the year to June through volume growth in mānuka shipments to the US and rigorous cost cutting. Chief executive officer Karl Gradon has deferred issuing earnings guidance and confirmed that Comvita will not pay a dividend for the current year.

While proclaiming itself the “global leader in Mānuka honey,” Comvita no longer discloses the value of mānuka honey it sells in total or in any market.

Comvita held an online video presentation of its results for the June 2026 year on 28 August. *Apiarist's Advocate* participated in the event. An investor presentation (26p), annual report (66p) and results notice (1p) were uploaded to the New Zealand Exchange (NZX) together with the results announcement (5p) on the same day.

(Unless stated otherwise, all data comparisons in this report are between Comvita's June 2026 and June 2025 years or 30 June balance dates for those years.)

Comvita recorded sales of NZD213.0m, up 10.7%, gross profit of NZD114.8m, up 38.8%, operating profit of NZD14.0m (vs. loss of NZD29.0m), and net (after tax) profit of NZD7.7m (vs. loss of NZD29.0m). Buoyed by NZD40.5m in share sale proceeds in May, Comvita held net cash NZD0.5m (vs. net debt NZD62.4m).

CHINA “MOST DIFFICULT MARKET”

North American revenues rocketed 66.5% to NZD57.8m (See Table 1 for a geographical sales breakdown). Reflecting the commodity

nature of the US market for mānuka honey, Comvita's headcount for full-time employees showed a total of 5 for North America compared with 187 for China, Japan, and other Asian countries. When all employee categories are included, the Asian total rises to 260 while the North American total is unchanged. Price, not people, sells commodities.

Amid intense competitive pressure, net contribution margin for North America collapsed to 6.6%, and has trended downward each year since the June 2022 year when it was four times higher at 26.5%.

The UMF™29+ mānuka honey product pictured in this article also illustrates the front page of the investor presentation. It is a face of “premiumisation” but untypical. In the US, Comvita's fastest growing and second-largest market after Greater China (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), most mānuka product is sold through the misnomer of “club retail”, which means off the floor of a warehouse-type seller that discounts to members (hence the term “club”).

TABLE 1: COMVITA GEOGRAPHICAL SALES BREAKDOWN (2025-2026) (a)

Region/Country	% of		% of		% Chg.
	2025	Total	2026	Total	Y.O.Y
Greater China (b)	77,196	40.1	73,570	34.5	(4.7)
Australia	19,740	10.3	16,328	7.7	(17.3)
New Zealand	11,876	6.2	13,487	6.3	13.6
Rest of Asia	43,349	22.5	46,048	21.6	6.2
North America	35,264	18.3	58,720	27.6	66.5
EMEA(c)	3,304	1.7	3,826	1.8	15.8
Other Countries	1,699	0.9	985	0.5	(73.4)
Total Sales (d)	192,428	100.0	212,964	100.0	10.7

Notes:

(a) Years To June. NZD thousands.

(b) China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

(c) Europe, Middle East, and Africa.

(d) Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: Comvita June 2026 year annual report.



Comvita Chief Executive Officer Karl Gradon marked his first year at the helm of Comvita
Source: Comvita Investor Presentation, August 2026.

No staff are recorded for EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa) where Comvita has opted to wholesale through distributors.

"Greater China remains our toughest market", Gradon wrote in the annual report. Greater China sales of NZD73.6m have declined each year and shed NZD35.4m since the June 2023 peak year.

BENEFIT TO BEEKEEPERS

"Industry inventories have reduced and raw honey inventories have stabilised", Comvita said in its presentation, which should be good news for beekeepers. Moreover, "Access to quality mānuka supply is becoming a competitive advantage".

On the other side of the hive, while inventories may have stabilised, global markets were unstable and geopolitical conditions (read, *the world is at war on multiple fronts*) uncertain. Markets weren't just changing in China, Gradon said. They were changing "everywhere".

Comvita is likely to remain dependent on the supply of large volumes of mānuka honey from outside its in-house apiary network. Annual report data show the percentage of honey produced versus that purchased declined to 32% in the June 2026 year, down from 51% the year before. As Comvita's apiary teams produced 500 tonnes from 19,000 hives (for average yield of 26.3 kilograms per hive), according to the report, implied demand from outside producers at 68% is 1,065.2 tonnes.

Demand growth is strongest for low mānuka grades. Comvita expects to meet demand for high grades from its own plantations which, established in 2017, use proprietary cultivars and now span "more than 6,400 hectares across 19 sites in the central North Island and Wairarapa regions", the report said. Using proprietary cultivars, Comvita produced 190 tonnes of high-grade honey from these plantations in the year ended June 2026.

Although Comvita highlighted inventory reduction of 10.3% to NZD79.9m, within total inventory, finished goods increased 12.9% to NZD53.0m, pointing to channel saturation. As confirmation,

TABLE 2: COMVITA SALES BREAKDOWN (2020-2024) (a)

Segments	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
UMF Manuka Honey	125.0	126.5	144.1	161.5	132.8
Other Honey	6.1	13.4	10.4	11.7	12.3
Manuka Honey Products	19.6	-	-	-	-
Olive Extract	10.2	7.7	8.4	7.0	6.1
Propolis	14.1	13.4	14.6	16.4	14.3
Medical Honey & Products	14.5	-	-	-	-
Other Products	6.3	-	-	-	-
Winter Wellness	-	-	-	-	2.0
Lozenges	-	11.5	12.5	16.4	16.3
Medihoney	-	7.7	10.4	11.7	10.2
Oral Care	-	-	-	-	2.0
Other	-	11.5	8.4	9.4	8.2
Total Sales (b)	195.9	191.7	208.9	234.0	204.3

Notes:

(a) Years To June. NZD millions.

(b) Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: Comvita annual reports. Values calculated from percentages.

the value of inventory written off and disposed, owing probably to best-before date expiry, leapt 171.2% to NZD2.8m. But the 43.5% decrease in raw materials inventory to NZD30.7m signals that Comvita likely will be active in local markets to the benefit of beekeepers.

DISCLOSURE WORSENS

Comvita's worsening disclosure has now become a trend. The decision to inform the public less about its operations became conspicuous in the June 2025 year annual report, equally apparent in the financial statements for the half year to December 2025, and confirmed as routine in the June 2026 year annual report. None of those documents, for example, disclose the volume or value of mānuka honey that Comvita has sold.

In the breakdown of sales by product category in reporting for the June 2024 year, Comvita disclosed the percentage weighting in the sales mix of nine categories — UMF Mānuka Honey, Other Honey, Olive Extract, Propolis, the new category of "Winter Wellness", Lozenges, Medihoney™, the new category of "Oral Care", and "Other". In the June 2025 and 2026 years, these were reduced to the three categories of "Functional Foods", "Health Care", and "Ingredients" (where "3%" is stated as "0.03%" in the June 2026 year annual report) (Tables 2 & 3).

Comvita may have reasoned that it was commercially disadvantaged relative to competitors by disclosing segment sales. Or it wished to hide non-performance. When the data were viewed as a series from the starting 2019 or even later year, it became clear that non-mānuka businesses had shown no- to low-growth, such as Medihoney™ and olive leaf extract.

STARTING POINT

Without the segment disclosure, analysts are robbed of a starting point from which to estimate total sales, which is first to estimate the components of those sales (and from there to construct estimates for each level of profits). The CNN article, "Anthropic files to go public in a potentially trillion-dollar debut" (2 June 2026), notes: "Wall Street would get a much deeper look at the company's business segments — including which products are generating the most revenue — through earnings reports if Anthropic were to go public". That's part of what being a publicly quoted company means.

TABLE 3: COMVITA REDUCED DISCLOSURE SALES BREAKDOWN (2025-2026) (a)

	% of		% of	
"Sales Purpose" (b)	2025	Total (c)	2026	Total (c)
Functional Foods	138.55	72	163.98	77
Healthcare	46.18	24	48.98	23
Ingredients (d)	5.77	3	0.06	0.03
Total Sales (e)	192.43		212.96	

Notes:

(a) Years To June. NZD millions.

(b) Comvita's description.

(c) The percentage and total sales values are reprinted exactly as they appear in Comvita's annual reports. The "Sales Purpose" values are calculated from those percentages.

(d) Comvita states "3%" in its June 2025 year annual report and "0.03%" in its June 2026 annual report.

(e) Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: Comvita annual reports.

Between the latest two full years, Comvita pared five pages from its interim financial statements for the half year to December 2025. Three sections were cut, including the section detailing investments in companies such as Uruguayan propolis supplier Apiter Laboratories.

DISCIPLINARIAN

Although the online presentation should have been as momentous as Lazarus' recall from the dead, Gradon and chief financial officer Mandy Tomkins-Dancey both read robotically from platitudinous and repetitive scripts. Only some questions were answered and the call ended after only 43 minutes with Gradon saying, "As there are no more questions..."

Gradon in his first year in the Comvita cockpit appears to have interrogated each line item of cost in data that underlie the income statement and taken a scythe to many of them. He almost forcefully repeats the phrase "Disciplined capital allocation", as though appalled at past investment decisions. "Cost management", "execution", "growth", "inventory management", and "procurement" are all to be "disciplined", he vows. A clue to this determination was inlaid in Comvita's April 2026 investor presentation for the life-saving capital raise, where "Deployed new forecasting tool" was stated under "Future-fit systems and capability".

SINGAPORE SLING

Singapore-headquartered beverage, dairy, and printing conglomerate Fraser & Neave (F&N; via F&N Ventures) became

Comvita's largest shareholder — and lifeline — with a 19.99% holding during the April capital raise.

Comvita hopes that the lifeline will extend to a life force. Gradon said that his leadership team would travel to Singapore this month, following an earlier visit to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand to explore opportunities that focused on distribution, supply chain, and innovation.

Aged-care sector investor PHC Investments (Waiheke Retirement Village) is second largest with 11.74%.

New Zealand Honey Co., a Mount Manganui-based, specialist online seller of mānuka honey and related products, has emerged as Comvita's fifth-largest shareholder with a 4.38% holding. Such an appearance is rare, as mānuka honey companies tend not to invest in each other, perhaps because they know too little or perhaps because they know too much.

The last example of note in Comvita's case is Capilano Honey (Australia), which held 5.4% in May 2008 but had divested before May 2010. At a time when Comvita shares were strong enough to double as currency, Capilano had accepted them for 91.7% of the payment for Medihoney Pty Ltd.

Comvita's share price closed up 3c to 82c on the day of the results announcement and 2c above the 80c-per-share takeover offer made by Florenz a year earlier. The stock market's "Well, OK" reaction reflected broad expectation that Comvita would achieve a profit turnaround. That expectation was already "in the price".

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

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Mānuka Demand Strong, But Boom to Bust Warning Signs Presenting Says Major Seller



Egmont Honey chief executive James Annabell has returned from a recent sales trip to the UAE and Europe buoyed by continuing strong demand for mānuka honey, but with a warning for the New Zealand honey industry that there are signals another boom-bust cycle could be approaching.

Egmont Honey has cemented itself as one of the country's leading honey exporters in recent years, last year putting 2,800 tonnes of honey into jars, supplying markets through the likes of Costco, Albertsons and Walmart in America, Holland & Barrett in the UK and UAE and numerous other retailers in Europe and the Middle East.

Annabell says he sat on the aeroplane home to New Zealand and New Plymouth positive about how Egmont Honey the brand is tracking, and mānuka honey generally.

"There is demand everywhere for mānuka honey, including in the US still. Awareness is much greater than it was," the Egmont Honey founder says.

Despite this, there were signs that trouble could lay ahead and the risk of a "boom-bust" cycle of honey pricing which besieged the industry over the past decade repeating is real he says.

"We are having to have tough conversations with retailers around getting price increases put through and we are getting genuine push back from the retailers. In many cases we are starting to lose shelf space."



Egmont Honey founder and chief executive James Annabell is buoyed by the global demand for mānuka honey, but has concerns that international retailers could delist product if price exceeds consumer's ability to pay.

Egmont Honey lost a supply agreement with major German supermarket ALDI recently, which had amounted to around 400,000 jars of honey a year for the past three years, "simply because the prices have got too high and they can't see the value in it," Annabell says.

Given the scale and diversity of Egmont Honey's trading, the chief executive is not threatened by the loss of one retailer in itself, but – along with losing some category listings domestically – is worried it could be a canary in the coal mine.

"Maybe, just maybe, it is a signal of the way things could go if we continue on this trajectory."

In 2026 honey prices to beekeepers have taken a significant upturn, after more than half a decade of consolidation and business failures within apiculture.

He says he is wary of being seen as a packer "just trying to talk down the price of honey to the beekeeper", stressing that Egmont Honey are beekeepers too – and expanding that side of their business – but that he believes it is important all industry participants think long term with their business decisions.

"I'm with the beekeepers, but am also looking at the long-term sustainability of the industry. Beekeepers have gone through some tough years, and Egmont Honey has helped clear the honey backlog, but we need to try and avoid the boom and bust because that cycle is bloody hard work for everyone."

His most pressing concern is if "one or two of the big retailers which are driving the growth in the industry get fed up with the price rises and lack of availability of stock".

"These big retailers don't sell food, they sell real-estate – shelf space – and advertising. If that shelf space is empty for a week, they are not making money out of it. Or, if the consumer is not pulling through and buying that product because it has got out of reach for them in a struggling global economy, they delist it pretty quick and they put something else up there, a maple syrup, or a big bucket of Nutella or the likes. That is the Costco model," Annabell explains.

He says some of the big international buyers are willing to lock into three-year contracts which would offer greater certainty of paths to the end consumers, but without the support of more honey supply from the industry behind them, inking those deals is not a reality for Egmont Honey.

"Beekeepers holding honey on the belief they will get better money for it later would be a risk because, if the retailers get fed up, then the cycle repeats. We all remember the \$3.50 a kg bush honey days, and we all also remember the \$14 bush honey days.



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Guess what quickly followed the \$14? The \$3.50. Bush honey is getting up to \$9 or \$10 a kg and the middle grade honeys are getting up there too, which is great for beekeepers. But that is probably about the maximum this honey can get to and still work as an effective blending honey.

"Because it sits well above the standard global commodity price for non-mānuka honey, its only real use is as a blending honey. When things start getting too frothy, we know that right behind it comes the \$3.50 bush honey days, and we really don't want to see that happen for the industry," Annabell says, adding "The cycle has well and truly begun again." 🐝

ALDI supermarket chain in Germany has delisted Egmont Honey due to mānuka honey's pricing exceeding what the supermarket says consumers are willing to pay, shutting the door on 400,000 jar a year client to the New Plymouth company.



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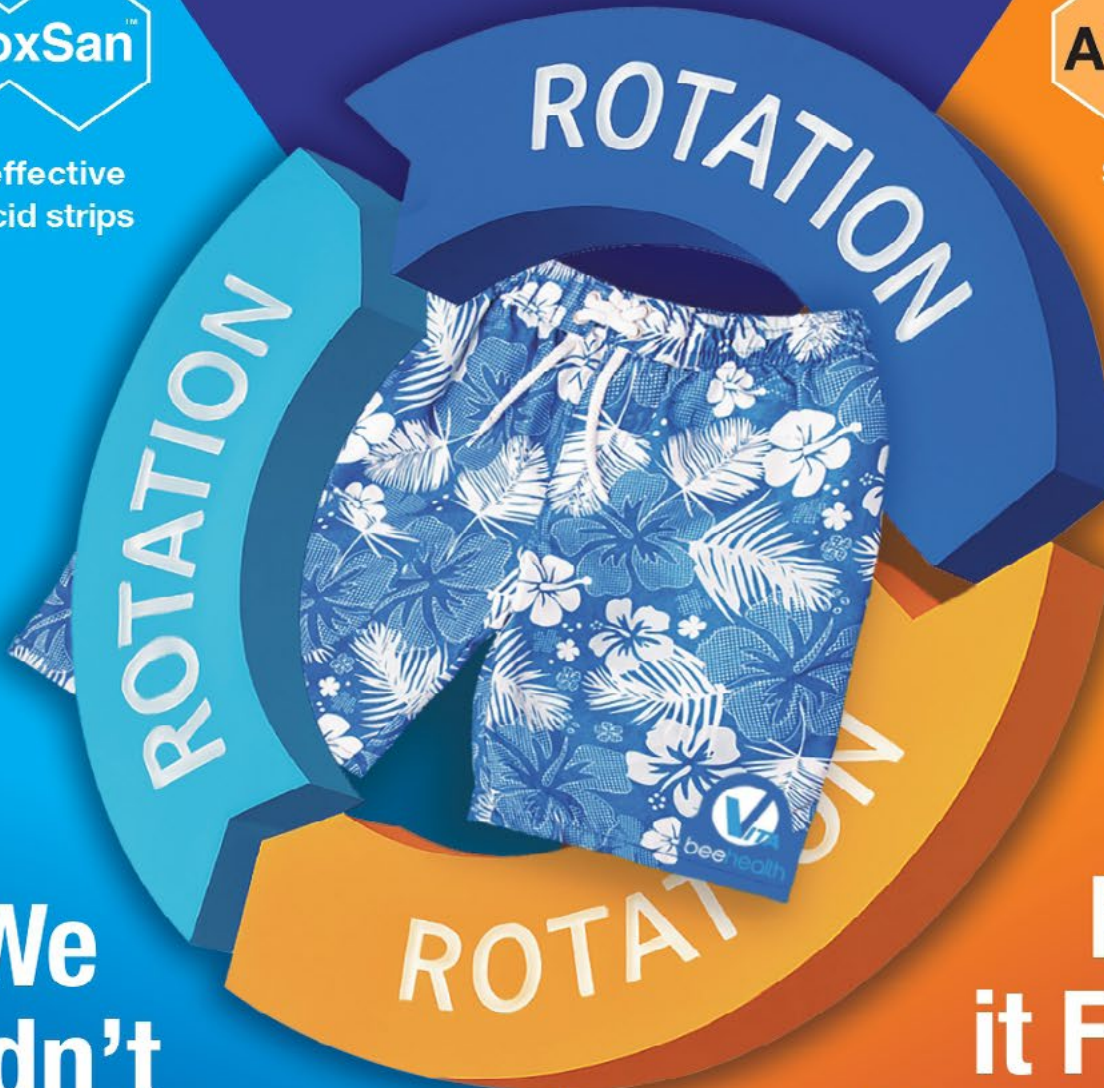
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Betting on Bees – From 100 Hives to 4,000 Through the Tough Times



BY ELOISE MARTYN

While much of New Zealand's beekeeping industry has spent recent years tightening belts and riding out uncertainty, Marlborough-Tasman beekeepers Matt and Sarah Goldsworthy have been doing the opposite – they've expanded, backing themselves and the industry all the way.

Between purchasing established honey and extracting businesses, welcoming their third child, managing around 4,000 hives across the top of the South Island and growing multiple parts of their operation, life has rarely slowed for the Goldsworthys in the past five years.

Despite entering one of the toughest periods the New Zealand beekeeping industry has experienced in decades, the couple remain firmly optimistic about the future, and it shows.



"It's not all about making money, it's doing something you enjoy every day," says Matt Goldsworthy, who has spent nearly 20 years beekeeping and, along with wife Sarah, has grown Goldsworthy Apiaries significantly in its first five years.

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Matt, 39, grew up on a dairy farm in the Wairarapa and discovered beekeeping by helping a friend during the honey flow. That led to commercial beekeeping in the Manawatū, followed by eight years in Blenheim before moving to Tasman six years ago. Along the way he worked for, first, Southern Sun Apiaries, then Taylor Pass Honey Company, followed by Sherry Valley Apiaries, all the while building valuable experience with the long-term goal of one day establishing a business of his own.

Sarah, 38, grew up in Auckland before moving to Blenheim to live with her mother, where she met Matt.

"He took me out beekeeping," she says.

"I thought it was cool and I liked the guy and saw a future with him. The way he spoke about bees was so cool that he was so into it."

The couple started with just 100 hives, but from the outset they were looking ahead. Their goal was to build a diversified business, growing hive numbers while expanding into pollination and other opportunities as they arose.

BACKING THEMSELVES DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

In Winter 2023, Matt and Sarah became co-owners of J Bush & Sons, a respected Marlborough honey brand with more than a century of history, having began producing honey in 1916. It was a significant step, particularly with the honey industry experiencing one of its most difficult periods.

"When we went to have a look at J Bush & Sons, it was too much of a beast for us," Matt explains.

However, a partnership made it possible for them to take the step.

"We wouldn't have done it, or couldn't have afforded to do it, without that support."

Before the partnership was finalised, J Bush & Sons took Matt and Sarah through New Zealand's largest working farm, Molesworth Station in inland Marlborough, where many of their hives are based.

"They said, 'we'd better show you what you're getting yourself into,'" Matt explains.

The transition was not without its challenges. Coming into the business during winter meant the couple had to quickly adapt to the scale of the operation and find practical solutions while building their own systems.

The couple say the decision wasn't without risks, but they saw it as an opportunity.

"It was an opportunity and on good terms," Matt says.

BAD STARTS

Like many beekeepers, the Goldsworthys know success is never guaranteed.

"The first season that we take over anything seems to be a bad season," Matt laughs, shaking his head at the same time.

"Over the last five years, every time we took something over, the first year was a bad crop. It's a running joke. 'Hey, we're moving into the area, you're gonna have a bad season.' But the next seasons that have followed have been much better."

When they took over J Bush & Sons they harvested just 22 tonnes of honey from the renown blue borage area of Molesworth when the expected amount was around twice that.

"We doubled our hive numbers last year, but only made half the amount of honey," Matt says of the poor 2025-26 summer.

For Matt and Sarah, the challenges were part of building something long-term. They continued looking ahead, and soon another opportunity presented itself.

BUILDING A DIVERSIFIED BUSINESS

In December 2024 the couple purchased Mountain Valley Honey in Spring Grove, Tasman – at the same time they welcomed their third child.

With a newborn, a new processing facility and the demands of both beekeeping and family life, the couple found themselves

navigating one of their busiest seasons yet. To help fund the purchase, they boldly sold their house and committed fully to the business.

"When Mountain Valley Honey came along, we both thought, 'this is it.'" Sarah says.

"We both saw what it could be."

The couple say Sarah's parents have played an important role in their journey, encouraging them to think big and offering valuable business advice that has helped shape many of the decisions they have made.

Mountain Valley Honey also created efficiencies by allowing both brands to be extracted and packed from one site. Today, extraction operates for around six months each year, while honey packing continues for around nine months.

Annually, they produce around 100 tonnes of honey, over 2,500 queens, operating approximately 1,500 mating units and 500 nucs, and provide pollination services with around 1,000 hives for apples and 500 hives for kiwifruit. That kiwifruit work extended as far as sending hives across Cook Strait to the Bay of Plenty in 2025, something they will likely do again in 2026.

With 4,000 hives spread from Hokitika to Farewell Spit, including Tasman, Golden Bay, Marlborough and Molesworth, alongside pollination, extraction, packing and raising a young family, many ask, how they manage it all. The answer? – "Teamwork," they both say.

BALANCING BUSINESS AND FAMILY

With their three children all under the age of six, and the demands



For Matt and Sarah Goldsworthy, despite huge demands on their time in a fast-growing beekeeping business, the top priority is time with children, from left, Harrison, Stevie, Gracie.

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of running a large-scale beekeeping operation, Matt and Sarah are intentional about making family time a priority.

"Family time is important, weekends are important, and getting away is important," Matt says.

The couple tag-team parenting and business responsibilities so one parent is always available for the children. Their business has also reached an important milestone.

With seven field staff now employed, Matt and Sarah are spending more time working on the business rather than in it, focusing on systems, planning and developing their team.

"The team is as passionate as us. It's a really cool team. We do some hard days, we have quite a few laughs, but this is what it's all about," Sarah says.

BACKING THE INDUSTRY, AND THEMSELVES

Despite the challenges of recent years, Matt believes the outlook for beekeeping is improving, and 2026's improved honey prices reinforce his view.

"When there's down turns there's also opportunities. The industry is now recovering. It's picked up a bit. Mānuka and pollination have picked up too."

Rather than expanding hive numbers, the couple plan to grow through greater efficiency, increasing exports beyond their current 10% of production, and public extraction plant tours and beekeeping experiences.

"We still want to be family-owned and hands-on. Once you get to a certain size, you're too big, then you're commercial. We have a focus on quality and our customers." Sarah says.

While Matt and Sarah are focused on growing their own business, they are equally committed to supporting the wider beekeeping community. They say they want to see all beekeepers succeed, not just themselves. Matt's recent appointment to the board of new industry group Honey and Bees New Zealand is evidence of this, and on August 21 they hosted a top of the South beekeepers gathering.

"We wouldn't be here without those around us who support us and we support them," Matt says.

For Sarah, one of the greatest rewards is producing honey from start to finish.

"I love that we are end-to-end. There are so many brands out there that just buy honey and put it in a jar, but we literally have our handcrafted bees and sell our own honey."

Whether meeting customers at local markets with their observation hive or welcoming school groups into their extraction plant, both enjoy sharing their passion.

"It's not all about making money," they say. "It's doing something you enjoy every day."

After navigating difficult seasons, major investments and the demands of young family life, the Goldsworthys remain optimistic about what lies ahead.

"All industries go through highs and lows, but we always knew it would recover. We just wanted to be in a position where we could make it work," Matt says, with Sarah expanding on the Goldsworthy Apiaries philosophy, "We aim for progress over perfection; you can't do it perfectly so it's best to keep focusing on what's important and moving forward." 🐝

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We're equally committed to investing in the next generation. Through ongoing training, career development opportunities and clear progression pathways, we're focused on building and retaining highly skilled people who can continue delivering the service and technical expertise our clients rely on. Our history may have started in a garage, but our purpose remains the same today as it was in 1984: supporting New Zealand businesses with reliable testing, trusted expertise and people who genuinely care about helping our clients succeed.

JOE VAREY, SENIOR CLIENT SERVICES MANAGER - TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Joe works closely with honey producers to deliver tailored testing solutions that support quality, compliance, and market access. As part of the food testing client services team, he is the link between customers and the laboratory, liaising with operations to ensure testing runs smoothly and results are delivered accurately and efficiently. With a longstanding interest in science and innovation, Joe helps customers navigate industry requirements and evolving market demands with confidence. Outside of work, the former festival DJ spends his time running, keeping fit and looking after his three cats at home.

PRAMIT PATEL, SECTION MANAGER - HONEY

Armed with a master's degree in Virology, Prमित brought his scientific expertise into the world of honey testing. He now leads Hill Labs' honey testing team, overseeing the testing process from sample registration through to final reporting. Combining strong technical knowledge with a focus on continuous improvement, he works closely with his team to deliver high-quality, trusted results that help honey producers meet regulatory requirements, support market access, and maintain consumer confidence.

MATT LEWIS, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Raised in the small Waikato town of Ōtorohanga, Matt was eager to explore opportunities beyond his hometown. He moved to Hamilton to study Biology at the University of Waikato and, like many science graduates, began his career in a laboratory. With six years of experience in the laboratory testing industry, Matt's role is to support clients to produce high-quality New Zealand products. In his spare time, he enjoys travelling, trying new cuisines, and making the most of new experiences with friends.

PAUL SWEETMAN, SENIOR VERIFIER

As a Senior Verifier at Hill Labs, Paul is carrying out audits and assessments to help confirm that food businesses are meeting regulatory and market requirements. His role involves reviewing documented systems, assessing on-site practices, identifying areas for improvement, and helping ensure operators are producing safe and compliant products. A key part of the job is working with clients in a practical way, so they understand both the requirements and how to meet them effectively. ■



Hill Labs' responsive and reliable honey testing customer service team, on hand to provide assistance when it's needed most. Led by, from left, Joe Varey, Prमित Patel, Matt Lewis and Paul Sweetman.

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Kānuka Honey: Time to Stand on Its Own



Passionate kānuka honey advocate Sri Govindaraju attended the inaugural Kānuka Industry Hui, hosted by the Kānuka Charitable Trust (KCT), August 17-18 in Rotorua. She reflects on what was discussed, the great opportunity facing kānuka honey and oil, plus the collective action which will be required to realise the native plant's potential.

BY SRI GOVINDARAJU

Kānuka Charitable Trust, alongside Bioeconomy Science Institute hosted the two-day Kānuka Industry Hui attended by more than 40 people from across the sector. Oil and honey producers, brands, exporters, Māori landowners, researchers, Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and other funders sat in the same room and asked a simple but overdue question: *what would it take for kānuka to stop being the quiet cousin of mānuka and start earning a proper return?*

The hui did not deliver finished answers, but it made one thing unmistakable. The science, the land and the market opportunity are already there. What is still missing is the collective will to build the standards, testing tools and provenance story that turn those advantages into higher prices for the people who actually produce the honey.

Kānuka is regarded as a taonga species by Māori. Honey is one of several value streams identified alongside kānuka oil, bioactives and land restoration. The hui confirmed what many producers already know: for most, kānuka honey farm-gate returns remain closer to native bush blend than to premium monofloral mānuka. The usual explanations such as limited research, low consumer awareness, biennial yields and a lack of practical differentiation tools still apply even though it is not entirely the case. The sector's

future will be strongest when kānuka honey is treated as part of a multi-product ecosystem rather than a stand-alone commodity.

IS THERE SCIENCE THAT CAN ACTUALLY MOVE THE PRICE?

Published research in reputable journals (see references) already shows that kānuka honey contains type-2 arabinogalactan proteins (AGPs) with clear immunostimulatory activity (TNF-α). Of all New Zealand honeys tested, kānuka consistently shows the highest levels of these AGPs, followed by kāmahī and mānuka. There is also supporting evidence for therapeutic applications of both kānuka honey and oil in topical and immune-support

Who is the Kānuka Charitable Trust and Hā Kānuka?

The Kānuka Charitable Trust was established in 2023 by a collection of Māori entities with an interest in kānuka oil, with the founding directors Manu Caddie and Richard Manning. Its purpose is acting as "kaitiaki", and providing "stewardship" for kānuka honey, to protect, restore and enhance the Taonga, its mana and supporting ecosystems for the enduring benefit of Tangata Whenua and all New Zealanders.

"Seeing what has happened in the mānuka honey world we saw the need to try and put some things in place for kānuka ... to try and work on behalf of the industry and look after the ecosystem and species," Caddie says.

"Making sure Māori are in the driving seat for the new industry and protecting that value for New Zealand. Making sure the story is strong and the connection to this place is there from the get-go."

Caddie reports that, to date, \$312,320 of funding has come from the Ministry for Primary Industries and \$179,700 from the kānuka oil industry, including Caddie's own business, Hikurangi Bioactives Limited Partnership.

Ha Kānuka is the "brand identity" operating on behalf of KCT, with the Māori "hā" translating to "breath".



Kānuka Charitable Trust founder and trustee Manu Caddie addresses the Kānuka Industry Hui, Rotorua, August 17-18, attended by around 40 people.

uses, including cold sores and eczema, with emerging interest in hyperpigmentation. Aligning this science with stronger clinical data would help position kānuka honey as a natural functional ingredient for the much larger skincare and cosmetics markets, rather than competing only in the table-honey and spreads category.

The Experiment Company (trading as PAQ Laboratories) has now established standardised tests to quantify AGPs, the key differentiator from mānuka and a test to support authenticity. The authenticity method measures four chemical markers that can underpin a monofloral or multifloral definition. These tools are available at commercial scale for beekeepers, packers and exporters.

The missing link is therefore not the science or the testing capacity. It is the absence of a robust, industry-owned grading and export certification system backed by a credible collective body. Kānuka needs its own equivalent of the UMF/MGO framework: standards, certification and messaging built around AGP potency, authenticity markers and provenance. Critically, that system must be developed collectively so that individual brands do not undercut one another.

WHAT ROLE COULD HĀ KĀNUKA PLAY IN THIS WIDER PICTURE?

Two commercial operators already offer standardised testing: Analytica (ALS Laboratories) for kānuka oils, and PAQ Laboratories for AGP quantification and honey definition analysis. Yet questions remain. How do we ensure these quality standards are recognised as credible for export markets? There is still no standardised method widely adopted for kānuka oil extraction. Neither MPI nor the industry body has a reliable system for gathering annual production data on kānuka honey. The hui highlighted these and other gaps like regional processing and extraction capacity, coordinated marketing and branding activity, which all remain fragmented.

Continued fragmentation will keep returns low, leave the sector operating in silos, and expose it to issues around intellectual property, counterfeiting and inconsistent quality claims. That's where KCT's "brand identity", Hā Kānuka, comes in. It is proposed that Hā Kānuka's role could be to bring these separate activities

under one umbrella: IP protection, standards development, marketing, science coordination and government liaison.

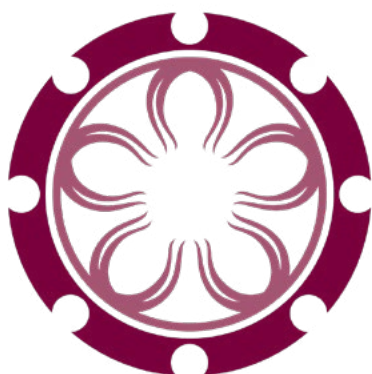
HOW CAN MĀTAURANGA MĀORI AND PROVENANCE BECOME A GENUINE ADVANTAGE?

The mānuka honey sector experienced deep fragmentation for a range of reasons. One lesson frequently cited is the relatively late inclusion of Māori leadership in shaping the industry's growth and governance. Kānuka, as a taonga species, holds a special place in mātauranga Māori. Whakapapa, kaitiakitanga and place-based storytelling are not optional add-ons; they form a clear and defensible long-term brand strategy. Internationally, consumers increasingly favour brands that can demonstrate authentic indigenous narratives, responsible use of native botanicals, transparent governance and benefit-sharing with local iwi and hapū.

Kānuka is also a pioneer species in forest regeneration. It has been widely planted on erosion-prone land, supports carbon sequestration, enables biodiversity in flora and fauna, and contributes to rural employment. These attributes align strongly with whenua Māori land-use goals. Honey and oil production sit naturally inside that larger land-use and restoration story.

REALISTIC MARKET PATHWAYS

The most realistic near-term pathway for kānuka honey could be twofold. In markets where mānuka has not yet reached saturation, kānuka can be introduced on its own merits through



HĀ KĀNUKA

The logo of Hā Kānuka, the "brand identity" of the Kānuka Charitable Trust, with the Māori word "hā" translating to "breath". www.hakanuka.co.nz



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targeted consumer education that highlights its distinct AGP profile, authenticity markers and provenance story. Rather than positioning it as a cheaper alternative to mānuka, the focus should be on building recognition for what kānuka uniquely offers.

At the same time, the cosmetics and functional skincare pathway should be actively explored. The oil sector has already shown that clinical evidence, particularly around eczema, can attract licensing interest and export partners. Graded high-AGP or authenticated monofloral kānuka honey can follow a similar route as a natural functional ingredient once clear product data is routinely available.

WHAT SUCCESS COULD LOOK LIKE IN 5-10 YEARS

Success would mean a functioning, industry-owned grading and certification system that lifts average returns for beekeepers and landowners who invest in measurement and quality. Producers would be able to test AGP levels and authenticity markers routinely and sell accordingly, rather than watching kānuka disappear into bush or mānuka blend pricing.

Hā Kānuka, or an equivalent collective body, would coordinate standards, science priorities, marketing and government liaison so the sector is no longer operating in fragmented silos. Funders would have clear, shared research priorities to support. The industry would be recognisably Māori-led, science-backed and commercially coherent, with provenance and benefit-sharing built into the brand story from the outset.

That outcome is achievable, but only if the practical first steps identified at the Rotorua hui – agreed standards, accessible

testing protocols and ongoing coordination mechanisms – are resourced and acted on rather than left as good intentions.

Sri Govindaraju is the founder and chief operating officer of The Experiment Company, an Auckland based research company, trading as PAQ Labs, which specialises in kānuka honey research and testing. 🐝

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Spring Time – Busy, Busy Again



What do spring rounds look like in the Bay of Plenty? Aimz reports in as she begins her third full season wielding the hive tool in the family business.

The winter blues. Windy nights and wet days seem intolerable, until the spring blue kicks in. Those endless blue skies. Warmth and growth. The perfect beekeeping weather.

Everything is on the up and up, including my frame of mind.

Spring rounds are drawing tighter. Stimulating the colonies through light manipulation and regular feeding encourages brood rearing, as we fool the bees with an artificial flow.

Artificial swarming is next on the agenda, splitting strong hives to increase our numbers, with the first order of overwintered queens due to arrive any day now.

After a couple of years beekeeping, my brain is in the game. Being the daughter of a great beekeeper meant that as soon as I stuck my hand up, I was thrown in the deep end. I admit, I was really winging it that first year – monkey see, monkey do.

The punt paid off though, and the vocation is all me. It really is an exciting career.

With great power comes great responsibility. Scaling the ladder and becoming a leading member of our enterprise means I am in that decision making circle. Which also implies accountability.

This is the job that never ends, it just goes on and on my friends. Out of the field, the beekeeper's brain is still planning, calculating and rehashing, maybe with a hint of worrying. Life is good though, and I can't help but bee optimistic.

I'm positively elevated going into this season with healthy bees and strong hives.

Varroa levels are negligible, as we have been hard on them ever since they thrashed us the other year. Oxalic acid is where it's at.

After a full round of vaporizing – five applications where we use three grams of acid per hive, applied every four to five days, we can reasonably assume that we are not harbouring mites in the brood. To minimize re-infestation our hives were bolstered with oxalic staples and the new Swedish cloth in strong overwintering doubles.

While vaporizing to those time frames on a commercial level can be a bit of a pain, we are streamlining our operation by upgrading our weapons of mite destruction, and adding another faster unit to our arsenal.

The next treatment date has not been set, and we are currently monitoring mite levels for self-assurance. With the warmer weather comes the ability to use formic acid for mite control, and I know Dad is hanging out to use it – his personal favourite, as it acts like a cleanser and disinfectant in the hive, while permeating brood cappings to kill mites lurking beneath.

Enough about the dreaded lurgy, they are not our problem right now. Pollination looms, as the kiwifruit industry beckons. Hold that thought, the focus is on getting around our hives in good time, marking splitters and putting out brood boxes, while pumping them with enough feed to survive until next time.

And so, busy, busy, until next time,
Aimz.

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. 🐝



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Accountability in the Public Sector



Concerned by recent controversial, and catastrophic, failures of the public service, former top bureaucrat Ian Fletcher analyses the occurrences, sets out the lessons that need to be learned, and identifies what could be done if we want to achieve greater accountability from our leaders.

BY IAN FLETCHER

There have been important (I'd say underestimated) controversies in recent weeks about the conduct and the professional fate of the CEOs at the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and at Tauranga City Council. The two controversies are different, but there's a common theme, and it worries me.

LET'S RECAP THE FACTS FIRST

Tauranga City Council chief executive Marty Grenfell is under pressure after the review into January's fatal Mount Maunganui campground landslide. It found the council had long known of the hazard; 2023 and 2025 advice to create an evacuation trigger plan was not acted on. The bottom line was that the deaths would likely have been avoided had the area been evacuated. The review does not blame a single person, but Grenfell – CEO for eight years – has become the focus. He says he is accountable for 'organisational performance' and is best placed to fix it. So far, he has the Mayor's support.

MBIE chief executive Nic Blakeley faces a personal integrity controversy. The failed Immigration NZ \$33m Biometric Capability Update ran for seven years and delivered nothing. It was finally stopped. Blakeley only became CEO in January, after the project had been cancelled. But the parliamentary Privileges Committee (effectively Parliament's version of a court) found that he and former Immigration NZ head Alison McDonald deliberately misled MPs in March by not disclosing the cancellation. They found contempt of Parliament – a serious finding.

Blakeley apologised and offered to resign; Public Service Commissioner Sir Brian Roche has declined the resignation, citing Blakeley's short tenure and tasking him with reform. Immigration Minister Erica Stanford supports him. A wider integrity inquiry remains pending.

Blakeley's apparent problem was not telling the truth, in circumstances where he seems to have known the truth. However, careful reading of the Privileges Committee report suggests a



Mount Maunganui Beachside Holiday Park was struck by a landslide on January 22, 2026, killing six people. An independent report has described the event as "entirely preventable" throwing the culpability of Council staff into public discussion.



more nuanced situation, where he (ill-advisedly) tried to protect what were said to be commercially confidential elements. Grenfell's problem was not seeing that the organisation he ran over a number of years was ignoring repeated, serious warnings. These are different problems.

WHAT DO THEY TEACH US?

Firstly, it raises the question whether senior officials should get second chances when things go wrong? The case against a second chance is a simple: you get the big bucks; you carry the can when things go wrong.

The case for a second chance is that the "off with his head!" solution is emotionally satisfying, but means the organisation learns nothing except how to scapegoat the next guy. This seems to be the sort of reasoning behind the continued support for both CEOs in these cases.

Yet, the truth is that these things keep happening.

This leads to the second question: How should public organisations actually learn from their mistakes? And, how do we (the tax-paying, voting public) actually know that lessons have been learned and implemented? I know how complicated these organisations can be, how defensive the public service is, and frankly how reluctant public servants are to admit mistakes.

This is not an abstract point: on beekeeping business, I have asked MPI officials in recent years why they are so defensive, so reluctant to make decisions or to even think new thoughts. They readily admit the diagnosis; then they blame Ministers ("they won't support us"), and point (privately) to a public service leadership culture that has excessive focus on risk, and too little on innovation, responsiveness and simple intelligence. They have a point.

THREE LESSONS

So, there seems to me to be three real lessons to draw from these two CEO-related incidents. The first is not that CEOs should automatically be chucked out when things go badly wrong. But second chances should not be automatic.

The second lesson is that 'learning the lessons' needs to be a tough process. The CEO or senior official involved has to explain

themselves and face the burden of proof – the process needs to assume they messed up and they need to show either that they didn't, or that there are genuine extenuating circumstances. This all needs to be used to expose whatever needs to be fixed. This is what the effective militaries do when things go wrong. We can learn from that.

I see the failure to foresee the Tauranga landslide as obviously and tragically serious given the avoidable loss of life. The MBIE incident suggests a want of candour somewhere in the system that corrodes trust, which in turn strikes at the heart of the legitimacy of government. So, these are both big, serious issues. Both CEOs should indeed face searching, uncomfortable inquiries.

The final point is that rank confers power, as well as handsome salaries. CEO-level and other very senior officers in the public service and local government should not be able to hide behind employment processes if there are questions to be answered. Quite simply, they should have less contractual protection than that afforded to less powerful people.

This might be seen as politicising the public service (as ministers would be more easily able to remove people they found politically uncongenial). But I think that's a price worth paying for a better match of power and accountability. It's what Australian jurisdictions do, and it works well enough and is widely accepted. The price we all pay for a politically neutral civil service should not be that it is inept, incompetent or deceitful.

All this raises – again – the question of why the New Zealand public service (and local government) is so pedestrian in its performance, and so unimaginative and process driven, at a time when it's not hard to see that we need a combination of energy, imagination and a culture of careful innovation if we are to start to tackle the future.

I can hear the excuses being marshalled – that it's for Ministers to come up with ideas, that risks must be managed (as they so sadly weren't in Tauranga), that there's a Code of Conduct for officials, and so on. Excuses are easy. Let's have the moral and political courage to say that we can do better. And do it.

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 CE for the Queensland government. These days he is a commercial flower grower in the Wairarapa and consultant to the apiculture industry with Honey and Bees New Zealand. 



Marty Grenfell, CEO of Tauranga City Council. How culpable should chief executives be when failures, such as those leading to the January 22 landslide in Mount Maunganui, be?


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