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Apiarist's Advocate

News, Views & Promotions – for Beekeepers – by Beekeepers

A New Group, with a New Name.

Will beekeepers swarm in?

A New Day – Honey and Bees New Zealand Calls for Members and Fresh Leadership

A new day for beekeeper representation in New Zealand has dawned with Honey and Bees New Zealand (H&BNZ) having called for both new members and nominations for directors of the successor organisation to Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), as efforts to amalgamate New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) continue.

Much is still unknown about the final shape of H&BNZ, but in the weeks following ApiNZ members' near-unanimous decision to throw out the old constitution and bring in the new the foundation has been laid to reattract members, appeal to NZBI followers to sign on to complete the merger, and bring in those not previously members of either beekeeping entity.

"I am pleased with where we are at," departing ApiNZ chief executive Karin Kos says, having helped a transitionary group advance H&BNZ to a point of being able to call for new members to sign up as of June 24.

"It's off to a positive start. We got people signing up straight away and even a few new ones."

Kos anticipates finishing her role on the week of July 20, just shy of 10 years as ApiNZ's one and only chief executive after coming on board at its formation when the National Beekeepers' Association merged with Federated Farmers Bee Industry Group in 2016.

The move to H&BNZ began following ApiNZ members' June 5 AGM vote to adopt the new constitution. Since then the transitionary group of Bill Savage, Jaime McRae, Cameron Martin and Barry Hantz, supported by Ian Fletcher and Tony Wright, have guided establishment of H&BNZ.

Behind the scenes Kos has continued to do much of the work required to get the group up and running, and will do so for a few weeks yet.

"We are ticking through that process now and hopefully by the week of July 20 I can say, 'my job is done'," she says.

Nominations for the five to seven elected board directors, as set out in the constitution, close July 13 and voting will take place between July 21 and 24. That will provide a group to take control of governance, concluding the transitionary group's role.

CALLING NEW LEADERS

Some nominations for those board roles have already come in, the transitionary group reports. Assembling a strong leadership core from the outset will be critical if the new commercial-beekeeper led group is to appeal to a wide membership base. Hobbyist beekeepers, and those from the honey market sector, who previously carried voting clout and thus control of ApiNZ, are invited to 'associate' membership, but under the new constitution are not eligible to stand for board positions, or cast votes.

A board of between five and seven needs to be installed and once set has the potential to co-opt two further directors to fill

How to Find Out More and Join Honey and Bees NZ

View the new website and constitution here

Commercial beekeeper membership form available here

Associate membership form available here

Director (board) info and nomination forms available via the main H&BNZ site

HONEY AND BEES NEW ZEALAND | pī·ā·ora BEES GIVING LIFE

The logo of Honey and Bees New Zealand, which has been designed to include aspects of Apiculture New Zealand and New Zealand Beekeeping Incs' logos.

seats. An information prospectus detailing the process states H&BNZ is seeking full members – and thus commercial beekeepers – representing a range of regions and business sizes, who have "a willingness to think beyond individual businesses and focus on the long-term health and integrity of the industry".

CALLING NEW MEMBERS

The new board will need a group to elect them, whom they can then represent, and attempt to make collective progress for. To achieve the latter, a significant base of members to fund the group will be required and, given the nature of the voting structure, that is surely going to have to come from commercial beekeepers.

"We have given beekeepers a really good offer and I hope they take it up and run with it," Kos says.

The "offer" has been built following extensive consultation over the past year, individually by ApiNZ and NZBI, and collectively, spanning in-person and online meetings up and down the country, and public circulation of a draft constitution before the final new set of rules was adopted.

To jump aboard H&BNZ 'commercial beekeepers' – which is as-yet undefined in the constitution – are to pay a $450 membership fee in year one (a pro-rata total reduced from $600) to secure full membership until March 31 2027. In addition to that, those beekeepers owning more than 500 hives are required to contribute an additional $1 for every hive more than 500 they declare, capped at 4000 hives.

NZBI DOTTING AND CROSSING AHEAD OF AMALGAMATION

Uniting ApiNZ and NZBI was a key consideration of forming the group with commercial beekeepers at its heart, and work is continuing to complete the amalgamation.

"We wrote much of this new constitution and we want it to work, but the executive has made it clear they want to do it in an orderly way and not just walk away from 10 years of work," NZBI advisor Ian Fletcher explains.

For that reason, the transitionary group of H&BNZ are to be presented with an NZBI policy document, outlining key areas of importance to them if the groups are to be brought onto the same page. The alternative, of walking away from that work without an "orderly transition" to the new group, is not viable Fletcher says.

"We are the guardian of our members' interests and they chose and agreed at the last general meeting to transition. What they haven't asked us to do is abandon all work. We are not in the business of being demonised, we are in the business of being responsible."

NZBI members have also been raising the issue of how their existing paid-up memberships with NZBI might transfer to H&BNZ, and this is still a "work-on" Fletcher says.

So, when it comes time to cast votes for the new board of directors, July 21, where does Fletcher anticipate the two groups will be on the task of ensuring a full and final amalgamation?

"I think we will be at a point where there is an irrevocable process of transition underway," he says.

MPI Still Working Behind the Scenes on Honey and Bee Alliance

While still short on details publicly, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is continuing to work behind the scenes to bring about an apicultural roundtable tentatively titled 'New Zealand Honey and Bee Alliance', "to assist the sector in building resilience, profitability and success".

In May various groups within apiculture confirmed they had been approached by MPI, the advance being led by the ministry's programme director for export growth, Terry Copeland, with the purpose of forming an alliance to better connect the sector and help commission projects of collective benefit.

Through June discussions have been ongoing and Copeland, when requested, released a statement saying they are "continuing to engage with sector organisations and exporters and will meet further with beekeepers to increase our understanding of their perspectives, needs and expectations before bringing the potential Alliance members to a hui in Wellington later in the year".

Terry Copeland, MPI programme director, export growth, has been meeting with beekeeping groups to garner interest in a potential 'New Zealand Honey and Bee Alliance'.

While MPI is not willing to say who those members might be, a document circulated to detail the concept to potential members lists the UMF Honey Association (UMFHA), Mānuka Charitable Trust, Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI), New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity, and Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated as proposed members.

Karin Kos, the soon-to-depart chief executive of ApiNZ as it transitions to Honey and Bees New Zealand, says there has been no communication with MPI in the last month regarding the alliance, with their concentrations being fully on establishing their own new group.

UMFHA chief executive Tony Wright has had several conversations with Copeland on the matter and says that, while the concept is promising, there is still plenty of unknowns.

"We are interested and it could be helpful. We just don't know," Wright says.

"We need to get through this reorganisation phase with ApiNZ and NZBI to understand where that is going to land to understand who we are dealing with in this alliance. We also need to be clear about the scope of the honey alliance, and at this stage it is not 100 percent clear who it is for and how it would benefit."

With Honey and Bees NZ succeeding from ApiNZ with a narrower, almost singularly, commercial-beekeeper focus, Wright believes connecting UMFHA and the new beekeeping group through such an alliance could lead to new funding streams and improved outcomes for the wider industry.

"It is potentially a forum to deal with broader issues without having to have the answers all ourselves. For example, if we wanted to conduct research projects there is stuff which UMFHA would do, there is stuff which Honey and Bees NZ might do, but there is stuff that is potentially best done by a coalition. That is where having MPI at the table is brilliant because they are potentially an entity that can fund things," Wright says.

At New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity their mandate is also narrow, focused on American foulbrood, and so chief executive Niha Long can see the benefits of an apicultural alliance, done right.

"I think it is a good initiative," she says.

"MPI do need to support our industry and it probably should have happened a little bit earlier, but it is now happening so that is really good. It is a matter of putting our heads together and coming up with initiatives which will help our entire industry. It doesn't matter who sits where, we all have skills to bring to the table and I think that is what this alliance is about."

In 2025 Copeland left a seven year post as chief executive of Federated Farmers to take up the task of boosting export growth for the primary industry on behalf of the government. A strong apiculture sector, due to the role of honey bees as the country's dominant pollination provider, is essential to primary industry growth.

There is no timeframe announced regarding achieving the "alliance" other than the hui slated for the, rather broad, timeframe of "later this year".

"The hui would create the pathway of how the Alliance will operate, determine what it wants to achieve, and then go on to set goals and a priority list of projects to assist the sector in building resilience, profitability and success," Copeland's statement sets out.

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From Fieldays to Open Day – Mānuka Orchard to Host Another Free Event for Beekeepers

Beekeepers are renowned for their gusto for a winter conference, and this off-season Mānuka Orchard's Open Day on July 24 will again be their best bet, with the Bay of Plenty honey processing and storage facility inviting the beekeeping industry to the free event.

Once again held in the Paengaroa Community Hall, the now well-established Open Day will mix expert discussions, trade displays and a dinner and drinks in nearby Mount Maunganui, as it has done since 2020.

With apiculture's main industry groups in rebuild mode, Mānuka Orchard has stepped into the fold this winter to not only throw open the doors for a day of beekeeping education and socialising, but also led the way by holding a stand at Fieldays at Mystery Creek, June 10-13, for the first time.

"We know beekeepers love to get together, to talk business, and just to get together at a quieter time of year in the work calendar," Mānuka Orchard owner Logan Bowyer says.

Register For Manuka Orchard Open Day – Free

When	Friday July 24
Where	Paengaroa Community Hall
Cost	Free
How	RSVP by email to justine@manukaorchard.com

Mānuka Orchard owner and director Logan Bowyer presents on 'The Future of Mānuka: Why the very best years are ahead' during Fieldays 'Tent Talks', June 10 at Mystery Creek.

"But people forget that for stuff to happen, you actually have to organise stuff. It doesn't all happen by chance."

Bowyer has certainly taken the bull by the horns there, with last year's Open Day drawing in approximately 150 beekeepers, suppliers, scientists and assorted industry stakeholders. With even less events on the calendar in 2026, a similar turnout is expected at the free event in the heart of kiwifruit country.

The day's speakers will include crop pollination expert Melissa Broussard of Plant and Food Research, speaking to her recent research into the forage value of pollen from Green, Gold and Red varieties of kiwifruit, and in honey science Megan Grainger of The University of Waikato's Honey Research Unit. The Ministry for Primary Industries will be represented by senior regional advisor Denis Collins as well as Sharon Morrell, who will update attendees on the yellow-legged hornet response and MPI's work with beekeepers. Beyond that, Bowyer usually takes the opportunity to update on Mānuka Orchard's latest services offered.

"Our online honey sales portal has developed a lot in the last six months, with a big focus on sales reporting. Therefore, I'm looking forward to sharing not numbers on the screen, as in the past, but decision-based graphs for buyers and sellers which showcase our pricing and orders which need to be filled. I think people around the industry will gain a lot by attending and seeing this alone, but there will be a lot more to interest too," the owner says.

Lunch will be catered, with drinks at the hall to follow the speakers and an evening social session at Mount Maunganui restaurant Master Kong.

FIELDAYS FIRST

While several honey sellers had a presence at the Southern Hemisphere's largest agricultural event, Fieldays at Mystery Creek, Waikato, June 10-13, Bowyer says the apiculture industry's only "business to business" presence was through Mānuka Orchard. He would like to see that change in future years, saying a dedicated apiculture section of the event, with multiple facets of the industry represented, would be of benefit.

"We made a commitment to be there, to represent the honey and beekeeping industry, but that investment was paid back ten-fold," Bowyer says.

More than 132,000 people filtered through the four-day event and Bowyer says their display – featuring a 'read the land' mini-putt and Wai Mānuka mānuka-honey based drink to keep punters engaged – was continuously manned by four people and continually busy.

"When you get out there, it is amazing," Bowyer says.

"You've got everyone from foreign diplomats, to board members of industry groups, to farmers and landowners who have parts to play in our industry, plus the staff and business owners that we do business with from day to day."

Connecting with landowners and offering a trusted bridging service between them and beekeepers was key to the Mānuka Orchard mission at the busy event and where Bowyer sees his business being able to add even more value beyond their existing honey services.

"All our post-harvest service comes from land somewhere, but I see varying deals between beekeepers and landowners, some of which are 10 percent profit share, some a fixed hive fee. But when it comes to what best suits the landowner, I think there is an element of trust we can bring to that deal, through the openness of the data we collect. We are a transparent business that has a data set of average price sales and if someone is saying 'I'm going to give you 10 percent', well if it is 10 percent of nothing it is nothing, but if it is 10 percent of a number based off hard data, then that is something. If both landowner and beekeepers trust the service provider, from extraction right on through with data collection along the way, then deals struck are more likely to be sustainable and longer lasting between beekeepers and landowners."

Bowyer also flew the flag for the honey industry by taking a public speaking slot, his presentation titled 'The Future of Mānuka: Why the very best years are ahead'.

He says he has already signed Mānuka Orchard up for a presence at Fieldays 2027, and he hopes their team will have some company from within the industry.

"There is a massive need for a uniform group to have a presence there. To be promoting the products, promoting the innovation of the industry, and to promote the industry in a positive light because we are a key piece of New Zealand's primary industries."

The Mānuka Orchard team of Pennie Miller and Dean Taylor talk honey at Fieldays with another interested punter.

Hornet Funds Expire – What Now?

Despite the government's major funding support for the yellow-legged hornet incursion in Auckland expiring on June 30, and further backing yet to be announced, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) say they have the resources to conduct present activities. Things could change in spring though, as the government department seeks to understand the success level of the response so far.

With no hornets found since early April, as they undertake a winter recession period which only the queen hornets survive, hopes are that it is not just this 'hibernation' hiding the pests, but actual eradication.

It will take years to confirm the latter though and, if there are more queen hornets waiting to establish nests in spring, it will be another major undertaking to reach eradication. The first season of response, spring 2025 through autumn 2026, was boosted by a $12million government fund which expired on June 30.

Biosecurity New Zealand acting commissioner north Angus McKay says the total cost of the response to June 30 will be closer to $14million though, and that they are currently working through the process of getting government approval to fund more of a response in spring.

"Although we have scaled back the intensive field work, several activities will continue over winter, including monitoring over 1,200 traps, self-monitoring of hives by beekeepers, and continued use of AI cameras," McKay explains.

"Our focus now is planning for spring when more extensive field ops will resume. While we have made great progress, we must be ready for the possibility that some queens have survived. Even if we detect no hornets in spring, we will need ongoing surveillance with no detections before we can confirm eradication."

There are no funding issues for the current winter activities MPI says, "and we have no concerns about future funding".

The $12million fund was announced by Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard in December 2025 and helped provide extensive trapping and surveillance, access to both local and international experts, and a public awareness campaign. In total 77 queens and 132 yellow-legged hornet nests were found between October and April.

Changing Chairs – A Passion for Biosecurity Entices Kiwifruit Industry Leader to AFB Trust

The Trust tasked with helping beekeepers eliminate American foulbrood (AFB) in New Zealand has a new independent chairperson. Simon Cook, a kiwifruit grower with a passion for biosecurity, enters the role at New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity (NZBB) having recently vacated the top chair at Kiwifruit Vine Health (KVH).

"I was sitting there looking at our industry potentially falling over," Cook says, thinking back to 2010 as the virulent strain of kiwifruit vine killing bacterium PsA took hold in the Bay of Plenty, threating destruction of the entire industry.

"I lived about half a kilometre from the first orchard that got found with it, and being a spray contractor I was contracted by MPI (Ministry for Primary Industries) to spray those first orchards as we found them. So that was my first taste of a response."

Simon Cook steps out of the top chair at Kiwifruit Vine Health to take on an equivalent role in the beekeeping industry, that of independent chairperson of New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity. Photo: Jamie Troughton.

It was the start of a passion for biosecurity that has seen Cook go from his contracting business and family's third-generation plot of Te Puke land, and kiwifruit orchard, to a Nuffield Scholarship in 2018 which saw him travelling the world to assess and report on biosecurity practices. More recently its landed him the chairman position with KVH, plus directorships with Horticulture New Zealand and kiwifruit grower representative group Trevelyan Growers.

"When I saw this role come up, given my background with KVH and everything else I've done in biosecurity, it was just a natural fit and I couldn't not apply for it," Cook says of his new role with NZBB.

NZBB is the successor organisation to the former AFB Management Agency. Last year it was controversially moved into a Trust with the existing board taking up the role of trustees. Following a recruitment process run by an executive recruitment agency the existing trustees signed off on Cook's appointment, replacing Christchurch non-commercial beekeeper and consultant Mark Dingle who had served six years in the top chair.

"Simon's application stood out due to its relevance and the working relationship between NZBB and the kiwifruit industry," says NZBB chief executive Niha Long.

"I have always said pollination is our biggest blind-spot, in terms of AFB control. So, with Simon's networking and connections within the kiwifruit industry it will certainly help us make some progress there."

Christchurch beekeeper and consultant Mark Dingle has vacated the top chair at NZBB having spent a busy six years in the role.

While NZBB might be operating under a name that suggests a role in biosecurity wider than just AFB, the Trust's mandate is only to help beekeepers tackle that disease. There is a need for "someone" to take up a wider biosecurity role for the beekeeping industry though Cook believes, affirming that as his "personal position", and that it is ultimately his fellow trustees and the beekeeping industry who need to drive any change to NZBB's mandate.

He's seen that in practice though, having witnessed KVH go from a PsA-specific group to an organisation dedicated to a wider biosecurity role for kiwifruit over the past 15 years.

"There are other risks out there past AFB, and so the industry needs to be working towards protecting itself, not just from AFB, but from any other potential threat," Cook says.

While NZBB trustees receive a small honorarium for their contributions, there is a significant aspect of altruism required for someone as qualified as Cook to offer their services, especially beyond their core industry. His acceptance of the role is not entirely without personal interest for the kiwifruit grower though, and it is also a natural flow-on from his KVH leadership he says.

"Within the kiwifruit industry, for a long time we've been concerned about once we got past PsA and we got into that wider biosecurity role, it was really looking at what the possible threats are to our industry. There's obviously a number of threats that are kiwifruit related, but also pollination is absolutely critical to our industry. So, any threat to the pollination industry is also of huge concern to kiwifruit. It's something that we've been looking at from our side of the fence for a long time – what we could do to support and help biosecurity within the beekeeping industry."

Cook will join fellow trustees Lubomir Dudek, Jody Mitchell, Brian McCall, Murray Elwood and Trent Proffit, the latter two recently having their tenures extended into 2029 as deputy chair Val Graham leaves alongside Dingle. Graham's seat at that table remains unfilled and the Trust reports "a low number of applications for the vacancy created", thus resolving "to carry the vacancy for the time being" and that "recruitment for a new Trustee will follow at a later date".

Simon Cook, a kiwifruit grower from Te Puke with such a passion for improved biosecurity that he "couldn't not" apply for the independent chair position at NZBB. Photo: Jamie Troughton.

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STOWERS
CIRCULAR SOLUTIONS

Caravan Honey to Enter "Settlement Discussions" With Mānuka Charitable Trust

BY BRUCE ROSCOE

Caravan Honey of the US has moved to enter "settlement discussions" with Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT) in the conflict over THE MĀNUKA EFFECT trademark. AUNU Beauty of New York, a brand incubated by Caravan, uses this trademark for its range of skincare products said to contain Comvita mānuka honey.

On 5 January, MCT filed an opposition with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) to Caravan Honey's THE MĀNUKA EFFECT trademark application (as detailed in our February report *Mānuka Charitable Trust Scores Own Goal in Trademark Attack on Comvita Mānuka Honey Cosmetics*. Although Caravan Honey's Comvita connection was no secret, MCT's filing stated: "Applicant is not a New Zealand entity."

After *Apiarist's Advocate* alerted Comvita and MCT to their disconnect, Comvita in January requested that MCT withdraw its opposition. MCT has not done so, and the opposition filing has entered its seventh month.

Given the short 30-day window in which oppositions can be filed from the date of publication of a trademark application with USPTO, MCT had adopted a policy of "oppose first, ask questions later" for all applications whose titles contained the word "manuka".

In the case of THE MĀNUKA EFFECT application, questions may arise over possible Australian provenance of the mānuka honey used in AUNU products. MCT is expected to assess the issue after it reads the Caravan response to its opposition. USPTO granted an extension of the deadline for filing that response to 4 July, on grounds that "parties are engaged in settlement discussions".

MCT's opposition filing states: "Australian entities producing honey from the Australian version of *Leptospermum scoparium* and around 80 other *Leptospermum* species have started using the Māori term "Mānuka" to trade off Māori cultural heritage".

TANGLED WEB

When Scottish author Sir Walter Scott in 1808 wrote, "Oh what a tangled web we weave…" he can't have been thinking about Caravan Honey and Comvita. Or maybe, through a feat of time travel, he was. Let's untangle the sticky silk.

The AUNU Beauty website landing page. AUNU Beauty products are said to contain Comvita mānuka honey and are sold under THE MĀNUKA EFFECT trademark, which is opposed by Mānuka Charitable Trust.

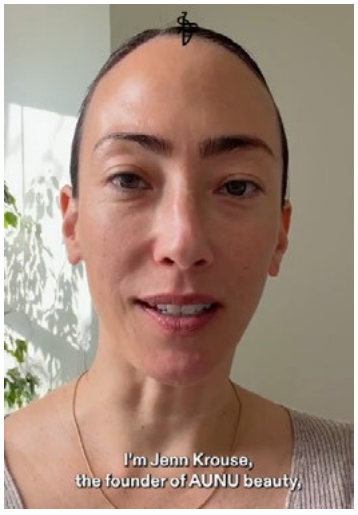
Comvita as of April remained a partner in the Medibee Apiaries joint venture formed with Capilano Honey of Australia in 2016 for the production of *Leptospermum* honeys throughout Australia. (Capilano Honey was renamed Hive & Wellness Australia in 2019).

The headquarters for the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) at 600 Dulany Street, Alexandria, Virginia. Although filings are made electronically, the nerve center that determines the fate of applications and oppositions such as those filed by Caravan Honey Co. and Mānuka Charitable Trust is housed within this building.

AUNU Beauty product descriptions include the MEDIHONEY trademark, which Comvita acquired from Capilano Honey in 2014 and sold to Derma Sciences of the US in 2017. US medical device manufacturer Integra LifeSciences acquired Derma Sciences (also in 2017).

Integra LifeSciences' website advertises a range of wound and burn treatment products under the MEDIHONEY trademark. These products are stated to contain manuka honey "derived from the nectar of the Leptospermum species".

The USPTO's schedule for MCT and Caravan Honey in this case now stretches to 6 December 2027. Both parties may need all that time to complete their arguments. It won't help that Comvita is no longer a partner in the Caravan Honey venture.



Jennifer Krouse, founder and operator of New York-based AUNU Beauty. Source: AUNU Beauty website video. Text under the video says: "Jenn partnered with New Zealand–based Comvita… to exclusively bring its pure, potent, Comvita™ Medihoney® medical-grade Mānuka Honey to the beauty market for the first time". https://aunubeauty.com/pages/meet-the-founder

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‘Tea Tree’ Oils & Honey Venture Projects Billion Dollar Industry

BY BRUCE ROSCOE

Tribal Therapeuticals Ltd of Northland is preparing to launch a “tea tree” essential oil and honey venture that it believes can generate NZD270m in export revenues over a 10-year period. The US state of California is identified as the primary export market and the directors believe the venture can blossom into a billion-dollar industry. Financing via private placement and crowdfunding is envisaged. Australian interests appear to anchor the venture.

This Māori-centric plant venture was seeded in Australia. *The Tribal Beat*, a Tribal Therapeuticals newsletter, records in its NZ Summer/US Winter 2025-26 issue that company directors began doing business in 1991 with Linda Brink, who then was trading in Australian tea tree products.

Fast forward to 2026. Brink is Florida, US-based and president of the US-registered Tribal Therapeutical Corp. She has written an “open letter to all Te Tai Tokerau”, which is pretty much everyone who lives north of west Auckland through to Cape Reinga.

Brink’s letter is published on the website of Tribal Therapeuticals, tribalteatree.com, the Kerikeri-registered company whose directors include Aaron Pollack, managing director of Golden Grove Naturals, which describes itself as the “leading Australian producer of native, natural essential oils”.

In 4,133 words, the letter notes plans for successive capital raises of NZD500,000, NZD1m, and NZD2m in the form of a private placement followed by crowdfunding in New Zealand, if my

This graphic, which appears on the landing page of the Tribal Therapeuticals website, conjures a colonial, romanticised image of handsome, innocent, indigenous people redolent of the quintessential “noble savage” of European literature dating to the 1600s. Tattooed, in traditional Māori attire, the female and male each hold a sapling of a native tree, silhouetted against a laboratory scene. At upper left, a deer skull is added to gothic effect, even though deer were introduced into New Zealand in the mid-1850s and later than the European honeybee. At centre, the “Mānuka Oil for Her” and “Kānuka Oil for Him” products, which are “rooted in Māori ethnobotanical wisdom” characterise the gender separation that is a hallmark of Tribal Therapeuticals marketing. The oils are steam-distilled from plant branches and leaves.

reading of the machine-like document is correct. *The Tribal Beat* adds a USD5m crowdfunding plan but both sources seem too convoluted for clarity to this writer.

HARNESSING ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Products from initial production runs will be exported to Australian-owned premises in California, Brink reveals in her LinkedIn account.

"I'm really pleased to have this US rollout supported by an old Australian tea tree oil industry friend and business associate through his family-owned natural healthcare distribution facility that has operated in CA since 2013," Brink writes.

According to *The Tribal Beat*, plans are afoot to combine mānuka and kānuka oils with Australian tea tree oil in a "Down Under Home Healthcare Pack". Mānuka is for her, kānuka is for him, and the tea tree oil is for home. "We put it to (our Australian partners) that aboriginal use of the…tea tree dates back more than 30,000 years…What a fantastic ancient story", the newsletter item enthuses.

(Via emails, Tribal Therapeuticals directors have walked back the proposed Australian cooperation but no response from either Pollack or Brink has been received to requests for confirmation of Australian content in published materials.)

WELCOME TO THE MACHINE

Tribal Therapeuticals makes a sweeping use of artificial intelligence (AI) — from website text, graphics, to presentations and reports in downloadable PDF files. The 15 files I accessed — there are more but one does not live forever — contain 63,767 words and all read as AI productions.

This AI usage is unabashed. "We regard AI as a research, modelling and drafting tool, much as previous generations utilized libraries, databases, spreadsheets and search engines", a Tribal Therapeuticals director (or AI) said in an email.

AI struggles with some facts of apiculture and its industry. For example, methylglyoxal is "found in the honey extracted from the mānuka flower pollen" (pollen is confused with nectar). Settlers Honey is among examples of "collapse or distress" (liquidation proceedings against that company were rescinded soon after they were begun in 2025).

AI projects a vision of Tribal Therapeuticals that appears to masquerade as a present incarnation where, for example, the company is a licensee of the UMF Honey Association and a unit of its operations is listed on the Labuan Financial Exchange of Malaysia. Trademarks stated as "registered" such as "whole-of-plant" and "Life-Force from Nature" similarly appear futuristic.

Typical AI text structure — "This is not that. This is something else." — ironically repeats throughout the documents, as in "This is not a concept-stage venture. It is now progressing execution-stage".

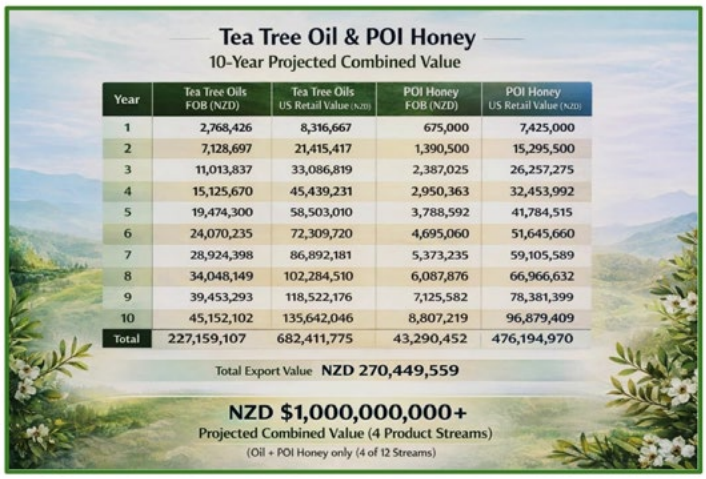
INFRASTRUCTURE WANTING

Official and commercial support infrastructure for mānuka oil is underdeveloped compared to that for honey. As though

transplanted from a United Kingdom database, export codes for the essential oils of orange, lemon, lime, citrus fruits, geranium, and jasmine are maintained by New Zealand Customs under subcodes of 3301. No code can be found for mānuka oil. Exporters must use an "n.e.c." ("not elsewhere classified") code.

Samples must be sent to an Australian laboratory for analysis as no New Zealand laboratories have found the volume demand sufficient to establish and equip an analysis service.

Because export data are unpublished, the scale of the mānuka oil industry is hard to gauge. Honey packing and dedicated oils ventures (the essential oil and personal care and cosmetics products that contain it) by and large have failed to gain traction in the sector.



This export and US retail revenue projection is printed in Tribal Therapeuticals document no. 6055 (p 5) and published on the company's website on the Biomass page. The "POI" in "POI Honey" abbreviates "plant oil infused". https://tribalteatree.com/biomass

A Distillation of the Tribal Therapeuticals Growth Forecasts

	Export Growth (%)		US Retail Growth (%)		Margin (%)	
	Oils	Honey	Oils	Honey	Oils	Honey
Year 1	--	--	--	--	33.3	9.1
Year 2	157.5	106.0	157.5	106.0	33.3	9.1
Year 3	54.5	71.7	54.5	71.7	33.3	9.1
Year 4	37.3	23.6	37.3	23.6	33.3	9.1
Year 5	28.7	28.4	28.8	28.8	33.3	9.1
Year 6	23.6	23.9	23.6	23.6	33.3	9.1
Year 7	20.2	14.4	20.2	14.4	33.3	9.1
Year 8	17.7	13.3	17.7	13.3	33.3	9.1
Year 9	15.9	17.0	15.9	17.0	33.3	9.1
Year 10	14.4	23.6	14.4	23.6	33.3	9.1
CAGR (%)	36.4	33.0	36.4	33.0	--	--

Note: Please see the text note under this table

In the above table, data for "Oils" refers to NZ export and US retail values for mānuka and kānuka essential oils. "Honey" refers to mānuka and kānuka honey infused with their respective plant oils. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for both the export value of the oils and their US retail value is the same at 36.4% and for the honeys the same at 36.4%. Those are the growth rates that, on average each year, are needed to achieve the Year 10 values. The margin percentage is calculated by dividing the export values by the retail values and multiplying the sum by 100. The margin data are presented only to show that Tribal Therapeuticals believes that trading in the oils can be 3.7 times (33.1 divided by 9.1) more profitable than trading in the honeys. (In actual trading, wholesalers and retailers would calculate profit margin by dividing their costs total by their sales total.)
It is unclear how Tribal Therapeuticals arrives at a value exceeding 1 billion NZ dollars in its 10-year projection (unless it is counting some share of US retail value, which belongs to a different industry to that of primary production and manufacturing in NZ). A billion dollars is more than double the NZD480m recorded for total NZ honey exports in calendar 2025. All table calculations by the report author.

"ANCIENT NATIVES"

A colonial tone jars Tribal Therapeuticals materials. "Tea tree" is imprecise and belongs to the lexicon of like terms such as honeysuckle (rewarewa) and Christmas tree (pohutukawa). Putting mānuka and kānuka oils in a "tea tree" tent invites confusion with Australian tea tree oil, which is produced from plantations of *Melaleuca alternifolia* trees, whose genus is separate from that of mānuka. (In Japan, among other markets, Australian tea tree oil retail prices are 10-30% lower than those for mānuka oil.)

Same-tent housing also flies in the face of continuing and costly efforts to secure indigenous intellectual property rights for the word 'mānuka' which, if successful, should benefit all industry participants.

Website text such as the "ancient natives of New Zealand…" amplifies the colonial cadence. An undercurrent of political activism also raises its head. One website passage reads: "…the flow-on effect of freeing 750,000 natives from the restraints of wealth inhibiting land laws…"

ONE DAY

The Tribal Therapeuticals venture has been brewing under more than one name for some 10 years. The company is reluctant to state in which year "Year 1" begins in the 10-year revenue projection. The greatest challenge to the launch may be finding investors who have the patience to follow the machine.

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

Integrated Pest Management for Varroa – Why Rotation Matters Now, More Than Ever

It's a term most beekeepers would have heard often 'integrated pest management' (IPM), but what does it actually mean and what does it look like in practice, in the hives? Vita Bee Health commercial director Sebastian Owen not only has the simple, clear and concise answers to those questions, but explains how the world-leading bee health company's range of products can form a reliable IPM strategy.

BY SEBASTIAN OWEN

For New Zealand beekeepers, varroa is no longer a new threat; it is a permanent biological pressure that must be managed with precision. The central lesson from decades of work in Europe and North America is straightforward: no single treatment should be expected to carry the full burden of control. Effective varroa management depends on an integrated management programme built around monitoring, correct timing, and rotation between products with different active ingredients and modes of action.

IPM is not simply "using more than one product"; it is using the right product at the right time, based on colony condition and mite load, while reducing the genetic selection that will develop and enable the mites to become resistant to a particular treatment.

Apistan. The tau-fluvalinate treatment for varroa can provide the foundation for an effective integrated pest management plan for varroa.

Repeated reliance on one chemical class, especially over multiple seasons, encourages survival of the mites least affected by that treatment. Those mites reproduce, efficacy falls, and colony losses become more likely. Product rotation is therefore not an optional extra; it is one of the main tools we have for preserving treatment longevity.

With its European and North American experience of the mite, Vita Bee Health provides beekeepers in New Zealand with practical options for a rational rotation strategy.

APISTAN

Apistan, based on tau-fluvalinate, remains a very easy-to-use and familiar benchmark treatment. While it has been overused and misused in some areas leading to (temporary) resistance developing, Apistan can still perform very well. However, because it is a pyrethroid, it should not be used season after season without alternation. Used thoughtfully within an IPM programme, rather than repeatedly as a default, it retains real value.

APIGUARD

Apiguard offers a different approach. Its active ingredient, thymol, is delivered in a patented slow-release gel, giving a distinct mode of action from strip treatments. It has become an important partner in IPM programmes because it broadens the treatment toolkit and helps reduce dependence on one mode of action. In addition, its residue profile and ease of use have made it widely accepted by beekeepers looking for robust control, along with the holistic benefits afforded by Apiguard's stimulation of hygienic behaviour among bees and its additional action against fungal, viral and bacterial diseases.

In regulatory terms, the European Commission is unconcerned about its maximum residue level because its toxicity and residue profiles are so low.

VARROXSAN

VarroxSan, a new product, is very timely, especially for New Zealand beekeepers. VarroxSan is an oxalic acid treatment presented in slow-release strips, designed to provide a consistent dose over an extended period covering multiple varroa life cycles. VarroxSan is highly effective, easy to apply, not temperature dependent, and accredited for use in organic beekeeping.

The overall practical message is clear: monitor mite levels regularly, treat before colonies are overwhelmed, follow label instructions, and rotate between treatment types rather than repeating the same chemistry.

For New Zealand conditions, the combined availability of Apistan, Apiguard and now VarroxSan means beekeepers can build a more resilient varroa-control programme than was previously possible. In varroa management, success is rarely about finding a single "best" product. It is about using good products intelligently, in sequence, to protect both current colonies and the long-term usefulness of the treatments themselves.

Apistan is available through a wide range of beekeeping suppliers, and along with Apiguard and VarroxSan all are available through Ceracell Beekeeping Supplies, www.ceracell.co.nz. The full range of Vita Bee Health products can be viewed at www.vita-europe.com/beehealth/products.

Sebastian Owen has worked for Vita Bee Health since 2011 and is currently commercial director, helping distribute varroa management and honey bee heath products to more than 50 countries. ■

Wear The Same Togs Every Day?

APIGUARD®

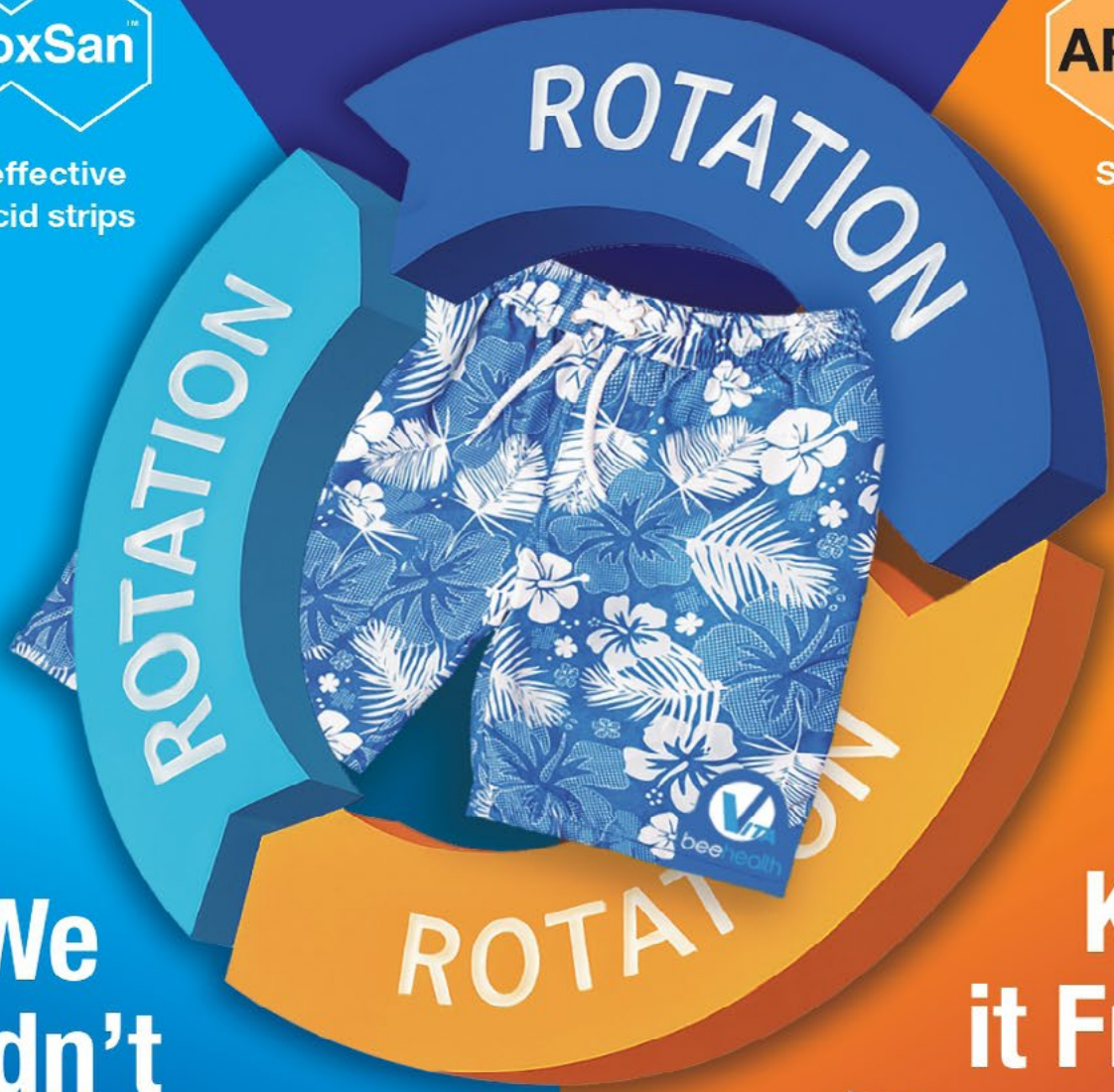
Naturally effective varroa control

VarroxSan™

Highly effective
Oxalic acid strips

APISTAN®

Simple and
powerful



...We Didn't think so

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Vita Bee Health presents the ideal rotational partners for your Integrated Pest Management strategy

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No Retirement Planned for New Zealand's Hardest Working Pollinator

Winter will soon turn to spring and the humble honey bee will once again be called on to pollinate a wide variety of flowers essential to New Zealand's fruit, vegetable and seed industries. We explore the relationship between growers, bees and beekeepers from the perspective of some of the country's largest horticultural companies, learning that in a world of constant technological adaptations, honey bees are still hard to beat.

BY ELOISE MARTYN

It might be 2026. Robots are picking fruit in orchards, artificial intelligence is writing reports, and dairy cows are being contained by collars instead of conventional fences. Technology is transforming New Zealand's primary industries in ways that seemed futuristic only a decade ago. Yet when spring arrives and millions of blossoms begin to open, the horticultural sector still relies on a worker that hasn't changed much at all: the honey bee.

For beekeepers, that's reassuring. Despite advances in automation and ongoing research into artificial pollination, growers continue to regard managed honey bee colonies as the cornerstone of successful pollination. Technology may assist the process, but it has yet to match the reliability, efficiency and scale that bees provide naturally.

At a time when beekeepers face challenges such as varroa, rising costs and uncertain honey returns, demand for quality pollination services remains strong.

POLLINATION AT THE HEART OF KIWIFRUIT

Nowhere in the country is the importance of honey bee pollination more evident than the Bay of Plenty, the centre of New Zealand's kiwifruit industry.

Brent McDowell was raised on an orchard and now works for one of New Zealand's largest family-owned kiwifruit packhouses and orchard management companies, Trevelyan's. He says honey bee pollination remains an essential service to kiwifruit orchardists, despite alternatives available.

Brent McDowell, grower services representative with Trevelyan's – one of New Zealand's largest family-owned kiwifruit packhouses and orchard management companies – works with red, gold and green kiwifruit growers across the region. He also brings hands-on experience as a grower, having been raised on a mixed orchard in Paengaroa that has gradually transitioned fully into kiwifruit.

Since joining Trevelyan's, McDowell says one of his key learnings has been the difference in pollination requirements between green and gold kiwifruit.

"Gold doesn't need as many bee visits," he says, noting it is easier to pollinate than green kiwifruit, which reduces overall pollination pressure.

He estimates that green kiwifruit typically requires around 12 hives per hectare, compared with about eight for gold varieties. He also believes green flowers may need around 40 bee visits per flower, while gold generally requires only four to six.

TECHNOLOGY HELPS — BUT BEES STILL FINISH THE JOB

Modern kiwifruit pollination combines bee activity with artificial pollen application. Male 'Chieftain' flowers are harvested, processed by specialist pollen companies, and stored frozen for use the following season.

This pollen is typically applied through "wet pollination", where it is mixed with water and sprayed directly onto flowers, rather than using dry pollen and blowers that rely more heavily on bees for distribution.

Despite such advances in pollen technology, McDowell is clear that bees remain unreplaceable.

"Flowering windows are long, sometimes two to three weeks, so timing is important," he says.

"The aim is to wet-apply pollen at full bloom when most flowers are open. However, there are early and late flowers and wet application isn't going to get everything, so bees remain essential. It's not possible to achieve full pollination without them."

In other words, technology can assist pollination, but it cannot yet replace the flexibility and coverage provided by healthy honey bee colonies.

WEATHER AND HIVE PLACEMENT MATTER

For their operation there are two things that impact bee pollination – weather and hive placement, McDowell says.

"Weather plays the biggest part during pollination. We can get rain for a few weeks which impacts pollination. That said, you get one sunny day and all the bees are out and they can get a huge amount done."

Hive placement has also become an increasing area of focus.

After reviewing 2023 pollination performance, McDowell developed a revised hive placement plan across orchard blocks, which has proven successful.

"We put hives at the southern ends of the blocks, in open areas that get a lot of sun and we seem to have a much better conversion rate. We also split the hives evenly among the blocks instead of bunching them together or chucking then in any place. Apparently, bees come out and fly north, they also need warmth to get them moving in the morning so hive placement for this helps," McDowell says.

GROWERS VALUE THEIR BEEKEEPERS

The relationship between growers and beekeepers remains central to successful pollination.

McDowell works closely with Kintail Honey, a third-generation family business with around 12,000 hives. He says they are known for supplying strong-quality hives and regularly feeding their bees.

He acknowledges current pressures on beekeepers, including varroa and financial challenges.

A honey bee goes to work on an apple flower – "Honey bees account for more than 90 percent of flower visits in orchards, making them by far the most important pollinator for the sector." Photo: Tom Allan.

"Pollination is a huge part of beekeepers' income. It's been tough with mites and finances, so it's nice to support them," he says.

While hive prices have gradually increased, McDowell says there is a balance between affordability for growers and viability for beekeepers.

"Pricing is upfront and we are paying per hive. Like everything it increases here and there, but I don't think the beekeepers are making a huge killing off it. They probably need to charge a bit more to make it really viable, but there is a balance for that cost and it has to be affordable and sustainable."

BEYOND THE KIWIFRUIT VINE

The same message echos in New Zealand's pipfruit sector.

Anna Lambourne, extension manager with New Zealand Apples and Pears Incorporated says managed honey bee pollination is fundamental to the industry's success.

"Honey bees are a critical component of our growing system, with apples relying on insect pollination to set fruit." Lambourne says.

"Honey bees account for more than 90 percent of flower visits in orchards, making them by far the most important pollinator for the sector. Good pollination is essential to achieving strong fruit set, which directly underpins yield, fruit quality, and overall production outcomes."

Like kiwifruit growers, apple and pear producers are placing greater emphasis on planning and collaboration.

"By planning earlier in the season, growers and beekeepers can work together to develop tailored pollination plans that reflect the specific needs of each orchard."

That planning includes decisions around hive numbers, placement, and timing to align with flowering periods. Strong communication between growers and beekeepers helps ensure both healthy bee colonies and effective pollination outcomes.

"Ongoing dialogue is particularly important as the sector continues to grow and evolve. Beekeepers need visibility of future orchard development so they can plan hive numbers and ensure supply keeps pace with demand." Lambourne says.

She also believes there is still more to learn about pollination itself.

"Questions around bee behaviour in large orchard blocks, the impact of netting, and the effectiveness of different pollinisers will require ongoing collaboration between growers and beekeepers. This is work we need to do together," she adds.

SEEKA FOCUSES ON LONG-TERM BEEKEEPER RELATIONSHIPS

At Seeka, New Zealand's largest kiwifruit growers, pollination manager Hector Pantano says maintaining strong relationships with beekeepers remains a priority as the kiwifruit industry continues to expand.

He believes loyalty has played an important role in the industry's development, particularly through the years when many beekeepers were drawn to the opportunities offered by mānuka honey.

"I believe a lot of this comes down to loyalty. Growers and orchard managers tend to support the beekeepers who have consistently been there for kiwifruit pollination over the years."

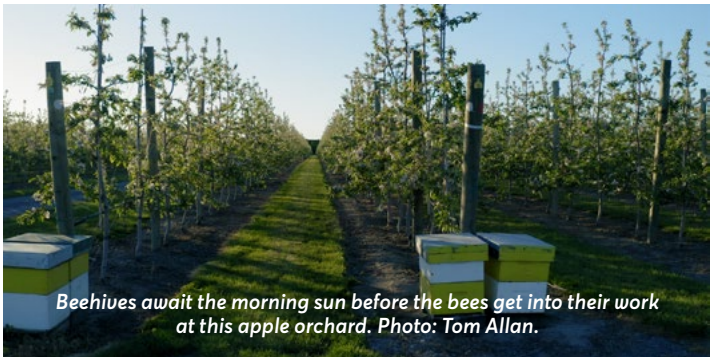
To help maintain pollination standards, Seeka uses independent auditors to carry out random hive quality audits across its beekeeping suppliers nationwide. Every beekeeper supplying hives is audited at least twice during the pollination season, Pantano says, with inspections carried out in person and feedback provided directly to the beekeeper.

Pantano says discussions around hive pricing are important, but ultimately growers remain focused on hive quality and pollination performance.

"We are always open to honest and constructive discussions around pricing. However, the key consideration for growers will continue to be hive quality and pollination performance."

Anna Lambourne, NZ Apples and Pears Inc extension manager, says beekeepers and growers need to work closely together on researching improved honey bee pollination.

Seeka pollination manage Hector Pantano says maintaining strong relationships with beekeepers remains a priority as the kiwifruit industry continues to expand.



Beehives await the morning sun before the bees get into their work at this apple orchard. Photo: Tom Allan.

LOOKING AHEAD

While technology continues to evolve and companies like Zespri trial self-pollinating kiwifruit varieties, there is no indication that any alternative will replace the honey bee in the near future.

After speaking with growers and industry representatives, there is a clear sense that while innovation is welcome, there is no urgency to replace a system that is already working effectively. Instead, the focus remains on improving efficiency and supporting the existing relationship between bees, beekeepers and growers.

Varroa Resistance Workshops Q&A

Just days away from the first of a series of six one-day workshops around New Zealand discussing breeding for varroa resistance in honey bees, the Bee Breeding NZ Group, led by Rae Butler and Linda Newstrom-Lloyd, answer their most frequently asked questions.

Will this workshop be suitable for new beekeepers? All beekeepers are welcome. These workshops are valuable for anyone seeking to better understand and work with varroa-resistant bees. They cater to all levels, whether you are a queen breeder, queen producer, or a consumer of purchased varroa-resistant queens. The network of informed feedback on the quality of queens and the effectiveness of methods is essential.

How much does it cost? The workshop costs $50+gst per person. The remainder is funded by the New Zealand Honey Charitable Trust. Invoices will be emailed to registered attendees before the workshop. Door sales are discouraged, as some venues may reach capacity. Please register or contact in advance.

What should I bring? If possible, please bring a frame of capped brood at the purple-eyed pupae stage. Two microscopes and other tools will be available.

Is the workshop focused solely on varroa sensitive hygiene (VSH)? No, the workshop will present six assays for identifying and selecting varroa-resistant bees. You will gain clarity on the advantages and disadvantages of these assays and field observations, so you can tailor your protocols to your preferences, budgets, and management style. We will explain how the term VSH has been interpreted in the USA, in contrast to its use in the EU. The workshop will include a demonstration of the Harbo Quick Test (brood inspection), based on research conducted in the USA at Baton Rouge.

Canterbury queen breeder Rae Butler will lead the Bee Breeding NZ Group's workshops.

Will you cover Randy Oliver's method for selecting low-varroa hives? Yes. All varroa resistance approaches are discussed. Randy's system falls within the category of methods that focus on mite monitoring and other field observations, which have proven highly successful. This approach does not directly measure hygienic behaviour. It measures and interprets mite population growth. Beekeepers are encouraged to adopt methods that suit their own operations and management style.

Does mite monitoring play a role in identifying and selecting varroa-resistant bees? Yes, mite monitoring is essential for identifying and selecting resistant colonies. It is the first step in screening to determine which of your colonies may have resistance to varroa. The workshop places strong emphasis on mite monitoring thresholds and trends, as well as practical decision-making.

Weren't VSH hives poor producers with unstable genetics? This idea is a remnant of early research into varroa-resistant bees. Beginning in 1992, no one yet knew which trait, if any, made a bee colony resistant to *varroa destructor*. They had to start from scratch to identify a trait. To do this, they focused on finding a trait that could reliably predict resistance. They knew that later breeding efforts would combine the resistance trait with other desirable beekeeping traits to produce valuable bee stock with both resistance and other important traits. Ongoing research since those beginnings has shown that the resistant traits can be transferred into any bee stock. Many operations are using the VSH trait at a commercial scale, and the idea of unstable genetics for the VSH trait is a myth.

Those attending Bee Breeding New Zealand Group's eight workshops on varroa resistance in July and August will be given the opportunity to inspect brood frames under microscope.

Will there be an online workshop? The first step is to attend in-person workshops. In future, if BBNZG receives strong support from beekeepers and researchers, it could also facilitate webinars.

For more information on workshops near you (in July and August) and to register, click here.

Bee Breeding NZ Group Workshops

Register Now

Advance your knowledge on breeding for varroa resistance: Workshops - held in both the North and South Islands in July and August.

REGISTER YOUR INTEREST NOW
www.bbnzg.co.nz/register
For more information phone Rae Butler 027 430 1106 or visit www.bbnzg.co.nz
$50 registration fee applies

SCHEDULED WORKSHOPS			
LOCATION	DATE	VENUE	ADDRESS
SOUTH ISLAND			
Mosgiel, Otago	Mon 6 July	Invernay Agricultural Centre	George Holmes Room, 176 Puddle Alley, Mosgiel
Ashburton, Canterbury	Thu 9 July	Ashburton Library Te Whare Whakatere	Wakanui Room/EOC 2 Baring Square East Ashburton
Nelson, Tasman	Mon 10 August	Greenmeadows Community Centre	Kotuku Room, 491 Main Rd, Stoke, Nelson
NORTH ISLAND			
Havelock North, Hawkes Bay	Sat 18 July	Aratiki Honey Visitor Centre	66 Arataki Rd Havelock North
Gisborne, East Coast	Wed 22 July	Eastern Institute of Technology Rural Studies (EIT)	Gisborne
Hamilton, Waikato	Mon 27 July	The Links Community Centre	Cattanach Hall 4 Te Aroha St Claudelands Hamilton
Orewa, Auckland North	Wed 29 July	Hibiscus Coast	216 Hibiscus Coast Highway, Orewa
Stratford, Taranaki	Mon 3 August	Stadium Bar & Bistro	62 Portia St Stratford

A Second Honey RMP Audit Provider Emerges

Honey processors now have a new option when it comes to seeking verification for their Risk Management Programme (RMP) or National Programme 1 (NP1) facilities, with well-known laboratory Hill Labs stepping into the space recently.

Better known for their extensive honey testing services, Hill Labs, based out of Hamilton, acquired two Canterbury-based food-auditing companies in 2025, now operating under the well-established Hill Labs brand.

It means beekeepers and honey processors now have a second provider for RMP inspection and verification nationally, with the Hill Labs service providing an alternative to AsureQuality.

"Our joint venture has performed strongly," says Hill Labs managing director Jono Hill.

"We've seen solid uptake from industry. Customers have responded positively to increased competition in the market. Bringing these inspection and certification services under the Hill Labs brand gives customers further clarity and confidence."

The verification team leader, Paul Sweetman, amassed 17 years' experience as an auditor with AsureQuality before joining the Hill Labs team.

RMP verification allows export of honey or bee products and requires, at least, annual verification checks, while NP1 registration permits domestic selling.

Hill Labs
Testing | Inspection | Certification

John Berry on: Rewarewa

Veteran Hawke's Bay beekeeper John Berry goes down memory lane, exploring the sights and smells of the nectar-abundant rewarewa tree and the bounty it provides bees and beekeepers alike.

BY JOHN BERRY

New Zealand Honeysuckle. *Knightia excelsa.*

I was looking at a young tree in autumn, maybe 15 years old, and it was covered in buds. They were unusually big for the time of year (early May, see photo). Other trees in the area had tiny buds, much more typical of autumn. However, I have seen trees in full flower in the middle of winter right by the water's edge in Tairua harbour.

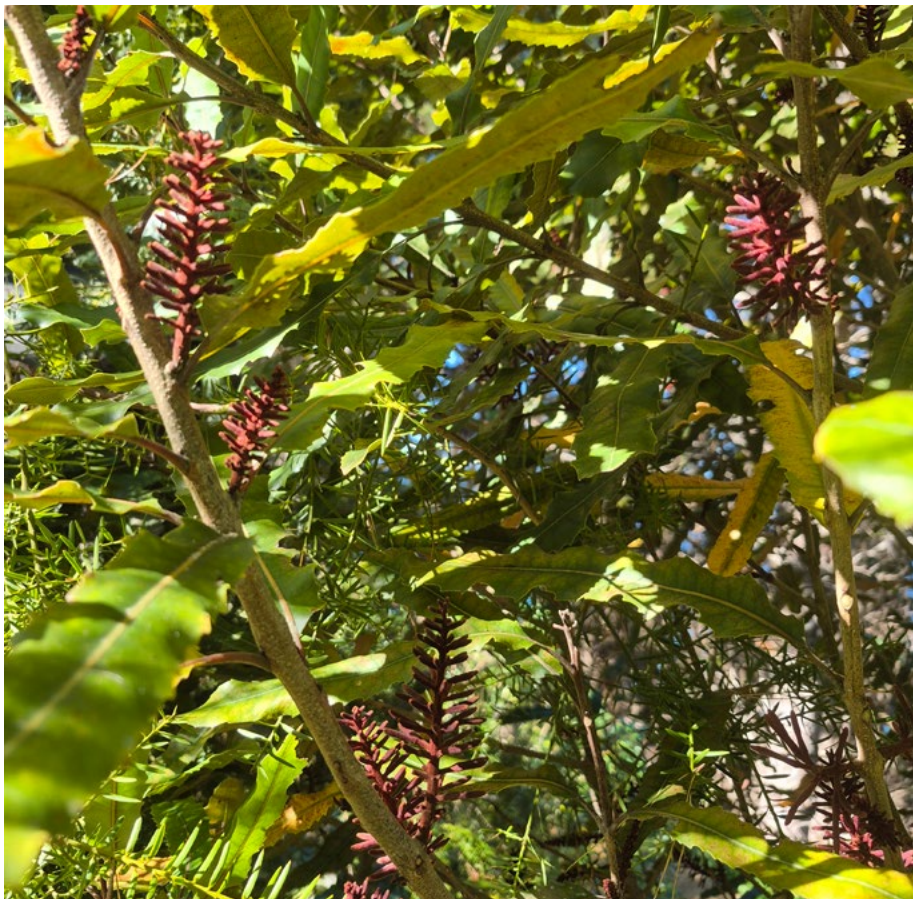
THE REWA CALENDAR

I love this dark, rich, red honey and I used to love producing it. It doesn't flower prolifically every year and you roughly get one poor season, two moderate seasons and one really good flowering every four years. Unlike many honey crops you can see the buds months in advance and at least have an idea of what potential is going to be.

One area in particular I knew very well. I knew which trees flowered every year and which ones only put on a show in a bumper year. Generally speaking the bigger the trees the more reliably they flower. Just because you had buds didn't mean you got a honey crop of course.

Rewarewa flowers earlier, October-November, than most honey crops and so is impacted more by variable spring weather. I have seen many seasons ruined by continual rain. I can also remember one year when the weather was just too perfect and the nectar was just too dry for the bees to collect. We had a few light showers right near the end and they did put on a box. I have also seen most of the buds blown off the trees. That might sound far-fetched, but that year we saw the prickles blown off gorse bushes. They were stripped on one side and, if I hadn't seen it myself, I wouldn't have believed it.

Rewarewa has an unusual flower and is not closely related to anything else in New Zealand. It is a coloniser species and you often see the emergent trees coming up through mānuka and kānuka. It can however grow into a fairly large tree and I have seen a trunk close to a metre through. It is a very decorative timber, although difficult to season.



This rewarewa was budding up unusually big for May.

Here in Hawke's Bay vast areas were cleared and burnt for conversion to pine trees. Beautiful regenerating forest and its destruction was stupid and thoughtless. I used to occasionally help my uncle over in Rotorua and there were some huge rewarewa forests out the back of Mount Tarawera that had been growing since the 1886 eruption. Perhaps the only good that came from its destruction was the awakening of the conservationist within me.

WHEN IT FLOWS YOU KNOW!

The first time I ever helped take off honey properly was from hives up the back of Kawarau. They were chocka full of rewa and we got 200 boxes with three of us. I was about 14 and between the heat and the heavy boxes, it just about killed me. I was helping Wick Baker, a man who worked for my uncle and a wonderful mentor to me. I loved every minute of it.

Between erratic weather and flowering you really only get a good crop maybe once in four years, although I have seen several good crops in a row. Unless you have seen a rewarewa honey-flow, it's hard to imagine. There is none

of this visiting dozens or hundreds of flowers for the bees to get a load. Each flower cluster has around a teaspoon of nectar and the bee simply lands on the flower, has a quick slurp and goes home. The flight of bees around the hives is unbelievable, but by lunchtime has often quietened down as they have so much fresh nectar they can't process any more. The brood nest gets so clogged out with fresh nectar that the queen can't lay and my father told me that when he camped beside an apiary one night they were still humming madly at 11 o'clock at night processing all that nectar.

It is the only honey I know that I don't like fresh, it has a strong overpowering odour which fortunately goes away after a few days. I don't remember why but, many years ago, I had to shift a truckload of bees up the Coromandel in the middle of a rewa flow. It was a warm evening with a gentle breeze and if you stood on the downwind side of the truck it became hard to breathe and you felt like you might faint. Powerful stuff.

I have seen hives full up when the nearest trees were over 8km away. I have taken two full boxes off hives and checked them a week later and there were two boxes full again (but uncapped).

You would think that bees would work this in preference to anything, but up the Coromandel where the mānuka flowered at the same time they would often take that instead. In those days rewa was a real bonus because you could A. extract it and B. sell it, unlike mānuka which was just used for feed.

Rewa is an extremely dry honey and can go below 14% moisture, which can make it very slow to extract. It has virtually no pollen

Rewarewa, aka New Zealand Honeysuckle, or Knightia excelsa to the botanists, an abundant nectar source when conditions are right in spring.

and for a while this made it very popular with the cowboys who liked to stretch out their mānuka supplies. It makes a very nice comb honey, but make sure you give them plenty of drawn comb so they have somewhere to dry out the nectar. Get your boxes on early, a few days late and every hive will be swarming.

RUNNING OUT OF STEAM

Perhaps my favourite apiary was called 'quarry'. It was over three hours from home, including half an hour down a very steep, unmetalled, farm track. If you know where the Black Stump is, it's a fair way past that. It was Dad's biggest site, with 50 hives and, in a good year, they would get three or four boxes of rewa followed by mānuka and occasionally tawari, plus a bit of clover.

I once ran out of steam trying to take a full truckload out and had to stop halfway up to unload half onto the ground, drive to the top and unload the other half beside the road then drive back down the hill and reload again. After that I took to taking two trucks at once and we would often get three-quarters of a load each before topping off at another apiary on the way home.

I turned 69 today and I am seriously thinking about hanging up my hive tool, but I would still love to do just one more big rewarewa year.

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

The MBIE Debacle – IT Failure Without a Fairy Tale Ending

The immigration minister says senior Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) staff misled her about a failed IT project costing $33million. Former top bureaucrat Ian Fletcher explains that such public-department projects, which can promise much, often suffer a sad ending, especially in New Zealand.

BY IAN FLETCHER

The phrase "… and they all lived happily ever after…" has never been used around government IT projects. Yet the fairy tale "once upon a time…" promise is how they all start, with simplistic claims that the magic of IT and a cheap cloud computing "solution" will take cost, complexity and frustration out of some government service or other, and make it wonderful. And cheap. All that's missing, it seems, is a fairy Godmother. There are plenty of evil cartoon characters, castles (mainly in the air) and simple plot-lines based on naïve hope, and a lot of magic taxpayer money from the bottomless well of plenty called "the Treasury".

The stoush in recent weeks over the MBIE immigration biometric identification system has shown all these features (including the immigration minister as Sleeping Beauty, waking up to find her castle taken over by a bunch of goblins). The Public Service Commissioner seems to be cast as a hybrid of Shrek and Prince Charming. The show continues.

This is entertaining politics in an election year. But there are two big issues here: How we manage government IT projects, and how we deal with failure, especially in the public service.

Immigration New Zealand hoped to improve their systems through a new IT system supplied by a private contractor, but were left with sunk costs.

MANAGING IT PROJECTS

Governments are naïve customers. They believe that government services (and government itself) can be made 'better' through digital systems. In some cases, this is true: if people want to get stuff done online, then that's good. But government services are complex, and people's needs are often hard to reduce to a set of algorithmic rules (which is how computers work). Sometimes, humans need humans to make decisions.

And governments sometimes don't understand their own business: for example, the IRD works well enough if it collects roughly the right amount of tax from roughly the right people, roughly on time. Mistakes can be corrected later. In contrast, the Ministry for Social Development's welfare system needs to get exactly the right money into the right account right on time. Errors really harm real people.

The immigration system is complex. It involves decisions about visas, so the right people are allowed in. But it's a decision ahead of time, so it can be tolerant of system error, but not of errors in outcome (so we get the right people in at the end of the day).

Separately, there's the border management system, so we know who has actually arrived. This is very sensitive – it has to let New Zealanders and Australians in easily, and apply other checks to visitors and migrants, all while sharing border information with others (like the police and the Australians). This was the area where MBIE's project came unstuck. Others (like the EU) are struggling with biometric border systems too. Problems should have been expected.

There is a second IT project weakness: relying on the private sector. Governments are poor customers because they don't know enough about IT system design and operation, and they rely on vendors' claims. Vendors have no interest in giving taxpayers value – they want to capture it for themselves. Governments also believe the hype – cloud computing is the answer, or AI is the answer. None of this is true – effective IT projects start with a really good grip on the business. There is a long list of failed public sector projects around the world, and the common factor is when the

government hands over the keys to the vendor, and then wonders why the company cuts costs and fails to fix things.

The solution is to retain an in-house capacity to do some work and to provide the skills needed to judge others' claims and performance. Otherwise, the fairy tale continues.

Is AI the solution? The best we can say is that the jury is out. Initial studies report real benefits in medical note-taking and associated administrative work. But other benefits are less clear-cut, especially as there is no accepted method of measuring public sector productivity. This isn't a cop-out; it reflects the genuine complexity of public sector work, and the fact that it often can't just be broken down into a series of tasks, like a factory.

DEALING WITH FAILURE

The MBIE project failed. Then it seems it was kept going in a zombie state, and then finally killed off before Ministers and others were really aware. The Minister has accused officials of a cover-up, and of deliberately avoiding scrutiny by limiting expenditure levels to fall below the thresholds for escalation. It's clear something has gone wrong.

Things in government go wrong a lot, and (in New Zealand especially) that's often treated as a surprise, because we have a real problem with everyone thinking the same (or pretending to), and everyone imagining that we're special and things will always go well (or pretending to). So, we handle failure badly when we're forced to face it. It's the Emperor's New Clothes fairy tale, acted out.

WHY'S THAT?

Two big reasons: first, we are over-centralised. Chief executives are given a lot of authority, but then hemmed in by compliance rules, a lot of mark-your-homework behaviour from the Public Service Commission, and a high degree of personal exposure – so ducking for cover is a habit taught from the top. Ministers don't – or won't – back officials.

Secondly, there's a real reluctance to think for ourselves. The easiest way to get things approved in Wellington is to claim it's what's done overseas, whether or not it's a good idea (or even true). And of course, overseas IT companies win both ways – they can pull the wool over departmental eyes, and then claim that's what other countries do. The sales pitches from big US IT providers follow this script.

Governments are naïve customers, especially when it comes to IT systems, says Ian Fletcher.

Finally, recent research shows that believing in business jargon (including IT jargon) is a sign of limited intellectual ability. One UK government senior management course I attended made us explain complex policies to a class of seven-year olds. It certainly defeated the jargon. And it really did end happily.

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 NZ Beekeeping Inc.

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

We'd love to hear it.

Email your 'letter to the editor' to editor@apiadvocate.co.nz

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