

ISSUE 81, APRIL 2026

# APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



## MĀNUKA

How did we get here?

Home to the highest value honey  
in the world, why are so many  
Kiwi honey businesses failing?

*It's Multifaceted*



# How Did We Get Here? The World's Highest Value Honey, but Beekeepers in Mire



New Zealand's export honey value per-kilogram dwarfs any other country in the world, thanks to mānuka's proven antimicrobial abilities. So, why then have so many honey companies – both beekeepers, honey packers, and those who do a bit of both – gone out of business in the past two years? We pose that question to beekeepers whose families have ridden the highs and lows of the honey industry through numerous generations.

**A watershed moment in the New Zealand honey industry was reached last month when Tweeddale's Honey in Taihape, the largest single beekeeping entity in the country with approximately 19,000 hives, entered receivership owing NZD24million. They are not alone though, with many more lower-profile operators suffering a similar fate in recent years, or pulling up stumps themselves to exit the industry before being forced out the door.**

While the big picture reasoning as to why so many beekeepers and honey sellers have not been able to make the numbers work comes back to the age-old problem of an imbalance of supply and demand and the resulting pricing, there are also more nuanced considerations which bring the sustainability of purely honey-production-focused beekeeping businesses into question.

## THE "WRONG TYPE" OF HONEY

The huge surge in New Zealand's hive numbers, more than doubling over a seven-year period to peak at 918,000 in 2019, brought with it a surge in honey production. That led to an oversupply of honey, but more so an oversupply of the "wrong type" of honey says Gavin's Apiaries owner John Gavin, a third generation Northland beekeeper.



*Gavin's Apiaries owners Liam, left, and John Gavin. The Northland beekeepers, the third and fourth generation in their 114 year-old family business, are dedicated mānuka honey producers and John Gavin believes the changing market for supply will reduce the prominence of low-grade MGO honey brands.*

"You talk to people in shops and they'll tell you that the UMF20+ honey would sell if they could get it. So, we were getting good prices, and they were making real good money on packing it too. Everyone was happy at that stage," Gavin says of the key mānuka years in the 2010s.

"The real question was, what was happening to the honey which was being stuck in the corner of the shed until such time as it was needed, or not?"

When the pendulum swung more to the "not", that put pressure on price to the producer, the backlog grew, and needed to be cleared.

## CLEARED, BUT AT WHAT COST?

Market signals within beekeeping would suggest that backlog, which has clouded first the non-mānuka honey side of the industry and then mānuka honey for more than half a decade, has been cleared. In-market prices for mānuka honey have fallen globally though, driven by bulk exports as well as cut-price and low-grade honey selling. MGO 30 and 40 mānuka honeys have emerged, offering consumers access to cheaper mānuka honey, with greatly reduced antimicrobial abilities for which it gained fame.

"If you wanted to pick on one particular Achilles heel that has caused the damage to our markets, the multifloral and MGO 30 and 40 'mānuka' would be our biggest issue," says James Jeffery.

From 2012, until recently, Jeffery worked alongside his in-laws, Bill and Margaret Bennett, and brother-in-law Alan Bennett at SummerGlow Apiaries in the Waikato, which the Bennetts founded in 1976. The business held the distinction of being awarded the UMF Honey Association's inaugural licence to sell. SummerGlow Apiaries was recently wound up though, after fighting years of diminished honey pricing.

"The mānuka honey industry has constructed a consumer base that are looking for numbers and looking for prices, rather than looking for quality and efficacy," Jeffery says.

"We've got a generation of consumers now who don't understand the difference between a MGO 20 and a UMF 20 honey, and why one of them is \$12 and the other \$120. It serves the volume-based supplier or producer well to have that confusion in the market and there are hundreds of brands out there that the viability of their business relies on volume," says Jeffery, who also served several terms on the UMF Honey Association board.

He believes that the confusion in market was potentially a greater contributing factor to the mānuka backlog than just soaring hive numbers.

"There's only so many jars of honey that people are going to buy and if they're buying the \$12 jars, instead of the high-grade jars, that's what creates the backlog," he says.

### COSTLY STUFF

The price returned from the final markets back to beekeepers for their honey is just one side of the equation though. Several long-time beekeepers say, on the other side of that equation, their cost escalations feel greater in the past two seasons than at any other time. With ongoing price pressures caused by the war in Iran, that doesn't look likely to change anytime soon.

Gavin also points out that while mānuka might be the most valuable honey in the world, per-hive production is low, limiting total hive returns.

It all contributes to rising cost, for too low of a return. However, beekeepers and the honey industry as a whole went through a period of overcapitalisation too, so say those who have come through the other side.

"I've seen some very expensive looking factories and things that require throughput to pay the cost of them," says Rhys Flack, who manages Arataki Honey Hawke's Bay, alongside wife Pam Flack (nee Berry), a third generation in the family business.

While the world's highest value honey needs greater resource thrown at it not just to collect it, but also ensure best processing and handling, Flack believes the honey industry to be well over

*James Jeffery, manager of SummerGlow Apiaries alongside several family members until it closed its doors recently, believes the mānuka honey industry needs to correct how its product is labelled, marketed and sold if its true value is to be realised.*



resourced for the amount of production and packing taking place – "we've facility to pack 10-times the honey produced in the country," he says.

"You've got to absolutely make sure you don't overcapitalise," says Russell Berry from Arataki's Rotorua base, himself also of the third generation of the 82-year-old family business.

It's a point the veteran beekeeper has long reinforced, along with the need to diversify operations.

"We do lots of different things and that is to our advantage. We run a tavern. We run a service station. We run a honey shop. We pack honey for the New Zealand market. We do kiwifruit pollination. We do a lot of bee exports. We do all sorts of things. I say that to everybody. You can't just be an individual on anything. Because anything you do these days, you may be going broke tomorrow," Berry says.

### A FREE FUTURE

While that tomorrow arrived for many beekeepers yesterday, mānuka honey exports hit record highs in 2025, and total honey exports of 12,732 tonnes equalled the record volumes of 2020 after several years of decline.

## HONEY TESTING

“It's hugely rewarding to work with the industry and support them with their honey testing.”

*"From beekeepers to packers, the passion across the industry is inspiring for me."*

If you'd like to learn more about our honey testing, call us on **0508 HILL LABS 44 555 22**.

**Matthew Lewis**  
Business  
Development  
Manager



📞 **0508 HILL LABS 44 555 22** 🌐 [hill-labs.co.nz](http://hill-labs.co.nz)



While the method of selling that amount of honey might not please all, those with generations of experience in the industry still see the free-market model which the industry operates under as best suited to building a more sustainable model for beekeepers. Certainly government intervention, such as something as overbearing as the Honey Marketing Authority (HMA) which controlled exports from 1954 to 1983, is not remembered fondly.

"My dad supplied the HMA as a single desk seller, and that did not work. You think we're price takers now, but we were very much price takers then. They just set a price," says Neil Mossop, owner of Mossop's Honey which was founded by his father Ron in the Bay of Plenty in 1947.



The HMA was government-established and took control of all honey exports and marketing, outside of comb honey. Even cooperative selling, such as the Honey Producers Cooperative which operated 1981 to 2014 and succumbed once mānuka honey entered prominence, was looked upon warily by those with lived experience. Instead, there is a feeling

*Husband and wife Rhys and Pam Flack, owners of Arataki Honey's Havelock North operation.*

*"You've got to absolutely make sure you don't overcapitalise," says Arataki Honey Rotorua branch owner Russell Berry of running a beekeeping business.*



that with recent knowledge of a boom-bust cycle and now around half the number of beehives in the country as at the peak, supply, demand and better optimised markets could organically result.

"For those selling a whole lot of MGO 40 honey, where are they now going to get the old honey which they were blending down with a whole lot of other stuff to get the MGO that they need?" Gavin asks.

"They were getting that old honey real cheap. You try and buy some of that old honey now and there is not much of it around."

That should mean better prices to the beekeeper now, Gavin says, and hopefully into the future as consumers access to low-grade mānuka honey is reduced.

Mossop believes there is no longer a place for the cut-price, low-MGO honeys for the industry going forward, despite that tactic helping to clear the honey mountain that beset the industry for so long.

"That was yesterday. We live in today," Mossop says.

"Hive numbers have dropped from close to a million to 400-and something thousand. The market has changed. Those in the market offering minimally priced honey and hoping the beekeepers will supply them simply have to get the price up."

# The Hive Defender Floor

ALL-IN-ONE WASP AND ROBBING TRAP

-  **Chemical-free protection** using natural instincts against invaders
-  **Better airflow** for stronger, healthier colonies
-  **Stops wasps & robbing bees** with built-in Beast Blocker
-  **Easy transport control** with closable entrance



**CONTACT US**  
09-274-7236  
info@ceracell.co.nz  
www.ceracell.co.nz



**SHOP INSTORE & ONLINE**

### THE "POLITE LIE"

Jeffery calls the use of the multifloral mānuka honey category and low-grade MGO selling as a "polite lie" being told to consumers. Rather than simply relying on the market pricing to correct itself, he would like to see greater leadership and stricter rules put in place to prevent the type of selling he calls "counterproductive, counter-intuitive and ridiculous".

"There has to be a willingness to move away from volume sales to value-added products. But how do you manage that transition and then how do you deal with the short-term pain for the long-term gain? Because, at some point – and our customers aren't stupid – they're going to understand they spent 10 years buying a low-grade product and 'you were lying to us'... There's got to be the willingness to say it's not sustainable for us to keep pumping out this low-grade product because eventually it'll be no more expensive than clover honey, but with the price of getting our product from all the way down here to all the way up to the international markets, we can't compete," Jeffery says.

### CAN A BEEKEEPER BE JUST A HONEY PRODUCER?

In a country at the bottom of the world with the highest value honey by far, can a beekeeper survive as just a bulk honey producer? Most of the long-established beekeeping businesses have their own retail brand.

"There is a need for those who just produce honey and sell in bulk," says Wendy Mossop, wife of Neil and general manager of their honey business.

*Husband and wife duo Neil and Wendy Mossop own 79-year-old Bay of Plenty business Mossop's Honey. There's no place for MGO 30 and 40 honeys in a sustainable mānuka honey industry they say.*



"If everyone put it in jars and sell like we do then you get the issue we had a few years ago with a glut of packed honey brands. No one wins, apart from consumers."

If those producers are truly needed, the free-market approach being favoured will mean appropriate pricing must follow. When it comes to mānuka honey, for those who wish to build a business specialising in production of the comparatively higher-cost and fickle-flowering shrub at the bottom of the world, it might just be a matter of higher risk versus higher reward. New Zealand's beekeepers have seen plenty of both over the industry's first two decades and where the chips fall in the future is a question best answered by gazing into a crystal ball, even with the hindsight of exploring 'how we got here'.

"Can you run a business with a good income one year and no income for the next two years?" Berry asks, having seen his family's honey operation survive for the best part of a century.

"It's pretty hard, and only heightened when all your eggs are in the mānuka basket." 🐝

## Need Quality Honey in Bulk?

Our website makes it simple, quick, and easy.

EVERY DROP IS: PURE • TRACEABLE • AUTHENTICATED

### VISIT MANUKAORCHARD.COM TO:

- 🕯 Source honey from our large network of NZ's best beekeepers
- 🕯 Quickly check type, volume, location, price, and availability
- 🕯 Reserve honey to market and sell in the future
- 🕯 Save time, effort, and money

### WHY WORK WITH US?

- 🕯 New Zealand's leading honey supplier
- 🕯 One-stop-shop to secure the honey you want
- 🕯 Honey is stored, monitored, and optimised by experts
- 🕯 We'll find you the best honey for your needs

[manukaorchard.com](http://manukaorchard.com)



**Access all New Zealand honey types at the click of a button.**

# Proposed Framework Puts Commercial Beekeepers at Heart of Industry's New "Church"



It's a no thrills framework, but industry groups Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) want beekeepers to heartily weigh-in with their thoughts on their combined proposal for a new industry body to represent commercial beekeepers.

**It hasn't happened in a hurry, and it isn't gold-plated, but the two groups have proven an ability to work together, consult with beekeepers, and even encourage a new generation of potential leaders to weigh in. Now though, they want to hear from more beekeepers about how the proposed model could be improved. The deadline to do so has even been extended to Thursday April 9.**

On March 16 a 'draft framework document' was circulated. It included the potential purpose, function, membership details and governance structure to 'act as "One Voice" for beekeeping with a focus on the Commercial aspects of beekeeping'. Further information on the document was also released to provide commentary and aid understanding.

Initially a deadline of March 27 was set to the industry to submit feedback, but that has since been extended to April 9. ApiNZ and NZBI have not been working to such short deadlines, with the industry-wide consultation now undertaken falling well behind their own initial timeline of 'November-December' for the task. There's good reason for that they say as they have worked together with authorities during the pressing yellow-legged-hornet incursion response.

"Never waste a good crisis," ApiNZ chief executive Karin Kos says of that work alongside NZBI on hornets.

"This has been excellent for putting the past aside and working as one for the sector and we have certainly been more effective."

That sort of 'unity' was the buzz word coming out of an industry day in August last year in Christchurch where ApiNZ members voted to keep their group running, on a thin budget and largely funded by money from the Honey Industry Trust. From there progress turned to a series of further regional meetings with beekeepers last spring, alongside NZBI. Those meetings helped inform the framework and proposal now presented back to industry, following back and forward from a ten-person commercial beekeeper advisory group.

## A FOUNDATION

The framework released is far from a complete constitution which would be needed to form any new, united, industry group. It is also far from where those who have done the lion's share of work putting it together – Kos and NZBI advisor Ian Fletcher – would like to see an ideal beekeeping industry body end up, but it could provide the "foundation" to build a functional and unified group.

"We are never going to keep everyone happy, we know that, but we also know we are starting from a small base and so this is the right thing to do to build trust and confidence," Kos says.

"What we are looking to put on the table is a structure that is a start," Fletcher adds.

"It is for the members of the future organisation to decide where they want to go. We can't tell people what the future holds and where to go with it, but we have a proposal which is realistic and voluntary because that is the reality we are in."

## WHAT'S REALISTIC? SOME NUMBERS

The proposal very much has commercial beekeepers at its heart, but missing is a definition of what a 'commercial' beekeeper is. That is for good reason Kos and Fletcher explain as at this stage they don't want to be seen to draw a line in the sand over hive ownership levels in an industry that has no fixed definition to work from. It's just one area in which they would like to hear beekeepers' opinions they say.

Those who, therefore, self-define as commercial beekeepers would be asked to contribute an annual membership fee of \$400 and those with more than 500 hives would be asked to contribute a further \$1 per hive for every hive up to 4000 hives. It would mean the smallest commercial beekeepers would pay \$400 a year to be a member, whereas the country's largest operators would be on the hook for \$3,900.

Alongside that full membership class of commercial beekeepers would be an 'associate' membership class who would not have voting rights, but would be asked to contribute financially and potentially contribute expertise through advisory groups. Proposed is an annual fee of \$80 for non-commercial beekeepers, \$200 for clubs, \$500 for industry suppliers or research organisations, and \$1000 for 'companies involved in extraction, packing, exporting honey without beekeeping operations'.

It's pie in the sky at this stage, but a revenue of \$140,000 from memberships is budgeted in year one, off the back of 120 commercial beekeepers owning 80,000 hives, plus 70 associate members.

## WHO'S IN CHARGE?

The self-defined 'commercial beekeeper' who stumps up at least \$400 is set to hold all the voting rights, which would include electing a board of directors. A minimum of five and maximum

of seven directors is proposed, two could be co-opted by the elected board. Those elected would need 'substantial experience in commercial beekeeping'.

Staffing of the organisation would need to be considered by the board.

"We have to be prudent and understand it will be starting from a low level," Kos says.

"The new organisation will have to decide what sort of support and resources they can afford accordingly. I would like to see some investment in it, because I know there is a level of admin required, but it is probably premature to determine at this stage."

Two voting proposals have been floated and it is clearly a major area where the authors are seeking feedback to determine what will best meet the needs of the potential members and industry.

The framework suggests 'starting from the premise that one commercial beekeeper (or beekeeping business) has one vote', while also offering an alternate weighted voting structure of one vote for those paying for less than 500 hives, two votes for those between 500 and 1500 and three votes for those with 1500 or more.

#### TIME TO GET BUILDING

After the extended April 9 deadline for consultation, the timeline for next steps includes a conference in June or July where it is hoped the new group can be ratified. Between now and then, the advisory group made up of commercial beekeepers, Liam Gavin, Jason Marshall, Rory O'Brien, Kowan Evers, Cameron Martin, Jaime McRae and Jason Prior from the North Island, and South Island

reps Matt Goldsworthy, Carolyn McMahon and Peter Ward, will again be consulted with and potentially form the spine of an 'interim governance group' to get through to a potential launch and full elections.

Recent years has seen beekeepers hesitant to fund industry groups. Kos says the projected new setup won't be a "broad church" such as ApiNZ's model which also includes full membership for non-commercial beekeepers and honey marketers, while Fletcher says it will broaden the NZBI church beyond that of just a "campaigning group" around specific issues.

Ultimately though it will be beekeepers who build and fit-out this "church" and that starts with doing their bit to get the framework correct, right now, with the close of consultation looming. The authors of the current documents say they will be listening.

"If we have learned anything through this process, it's that you can't tell beekeepers what to think," Fletcher says. 🐝

## Important documents and contact links

- [Information on proposed new beekeeping organisation](#)
- [Draft proposed framework](#)
- [Email address to submit feedback: neworgfeedback@gmail.com](#)

**HD** Process NZ 

Specialists in sanitary process equipment

# Honey processing equipment

## Pumps

- ▶ Flexible impeller
- ▶ Progressive cavity
- ▶ Lobe



10 Maurice Road, Penrose, Auckland  
Ph: +64 9 580 2520 Fax: +64 9 580 2525

## Filters

- ▶ Rotary self cleaning
- ▶ Bag filters



**NEW**  
Filter with heating and agitation helping wax removal

## Heat exchangers

- ▶ Shell and tube
- ▶ Plate and frame



## Extraction and processing

- ▶ Honey looseners
- ▶ Extractors
- ▶ Drum filling



Please enquire to: [james@hdprocess.co.nz](mailto:james@hdprocess.co.nz)  
or visit: [hdprocess.co.nz](http://hdprocess.co.nz)

PUMPS | FILTERS | HEAT EXCHANGERS | EXTRACTION | PROCESSING

# Wear The Same Togs Every Day?



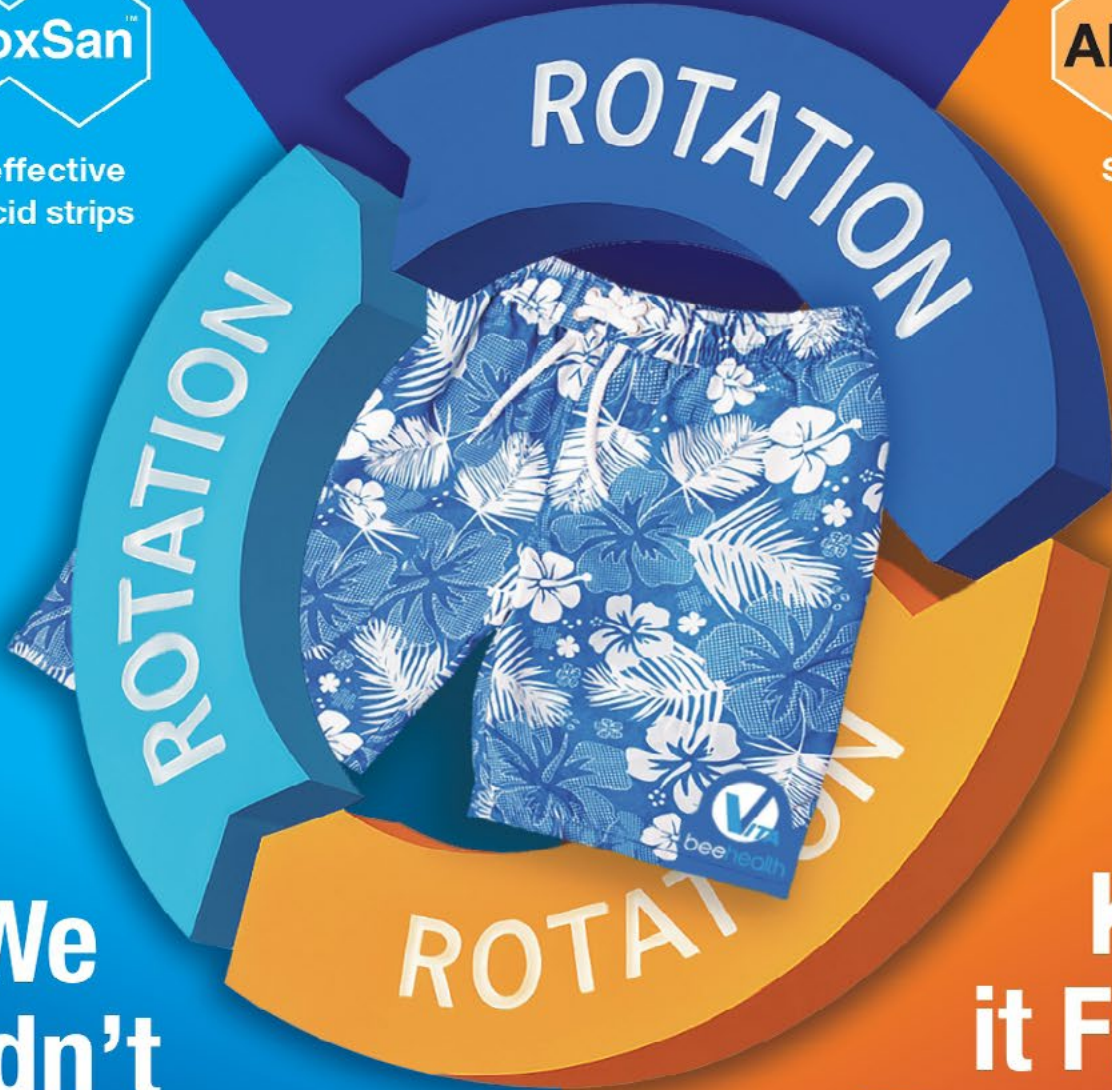
Naturally effective varroa control



Highly effective  
Oxalic acid strips



Simple and  
powerful



...We  
Didn't  
think so

Keep  
it Fresh

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



Ceracell are Vita's exclusive distributors in NZ and Australia.

[www.vitabeehealth.com](http://www.vitabeehealth.com)

[healthybeeguide.com](http://healthybeeguide.com)

[vitabeehealth](https://www.facebook.com/vitabeehealth)

[@vitabeehealth](https://twitter.com/vitabeehealth)



# Varroa Treatment Resistance Uncovered in Australia – “Shot Across the Bows” for NZ



Three and half years on from first finding varroa in Australia, authorities have detected a gene mutation in the parasite which is resulting in lower susceptibility to several common treatments.

Has this ‘resistance’ developed in such a short period? Is it the result of a separate, parallel, mite incursion? Or has it just been missed to this point? Australian beekeepers and scientists are searching for answers, while experts in New Zealand say the news should put Kiwi beekeepers on notice.

**First a northern New South Wales beekeeper raised the alarm in February when it appeared his varroa treatments had not had the desired effect. Testing on those mites showed a common mutation also found in North America, Europe and Eurasia resulting in synthetic pyrethroid resistance was present. In March, similar mutations were found in southeast Queensland in populations linked to the first discovery.**

“If it is truly locally grown resistance that is concerning and equally, if it is a new mite population, that is also very concerning,” says Bianca Giggins, who has been at the front line of Australia’s varroa response as first the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council’s (AHBIC) varroa coordinator and now industry development manager.

Miticide treatments Bayvarol, which has the active compound of flumethrin, and Apistan, active compound tau-fluvalinate, fall into the synthetic pyrethroid category. Both are registered for use in Australia and New Zealand.

## HOME GROWN OR IMPORTED

While nothing has yet been confirmed and testing of Australia’s varroa population is ongoing, there is a strong hunch as to how this mutation came to be.

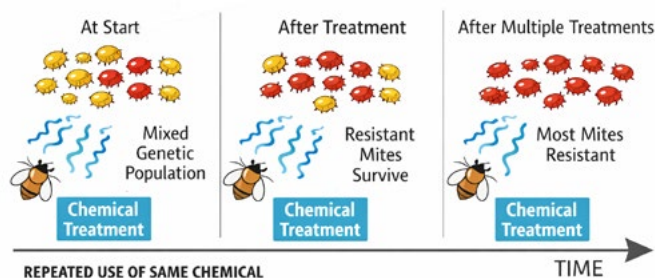
“At this stage, based on the current limited testing, resistant mites appear to be localised to a relatively small geographic area and have mainly been identified in situations where treatments have not performed as expected,” AHBIC chief executive Danny Le Feuvre has told their members.

“Testing of apiaries around the identified resistant apiaries has shown no mutations and a high level of susceptibility to Bayvarol. This is important as currently the tested mites have either been 100% resistant or highly susceptible with no in-between, which is not what you would expect if it was locally grown resistance.

“This indicates there is a strong likelihood that this could be a new varroa population entering Australia, rather than resistance developing from the existing mite population. That distinction matters, because it suggests this is not yet a widespread national issue – but it does reinforce the ongoing importance of biosecurity vigilance.”

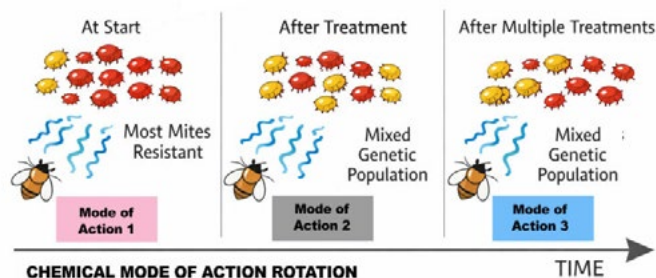
Giggins says as part of Australia’s “transition to management” of the mite over 100 educational workshops have been delivered and around 50% of the country’s 47,000 registered beekeepers have been reached by a “world class extension network” which has had an “emphasis on best practice varroa management, chemical rotation, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies and business resilience”.

## RESISTANCE DEVELOPMENT IN MIXED VARROA MITE POPULATION



Example of resistance development occurring due to repeated use of same chemical mode of action; red = resistance mites, yellow = susceptible mites.

## RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT IN MIXED VARROA MITE POPULATION



Example of resistance management involving rotation of chemical mode of action; red = resistance mites, yellow = susceptible mites.

"We have also observed mixed and variable application of this new information among industry, but overall, Australia's beekeeping industry has built new management skills in a very short timeframe which we are very proud to have achieved," Giggins says.

Several New Zealand-based beekeeping supply companies' sales data into Australia would seem to support the belief that, on the whole, Australia beekeepers' management practices are not likely to have created pyrethroid resistance in such a short period of time. IPM (principally rotating treatments between chemical families) has largely been undertaken believe both New Zealand Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor and Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies chief executive Greg Smith.

Within the NZ Beeswax range, Taylor says Apivar, with the active compound amitraz, has been "by far" their biggest seller to Australia, but there is a "big three" rounded out by Bayvarol and Formic Pro. Oxalic acid is also known to be popular among Australian apiarists, many of who chase a long honey season, as it can be safely used while supers are preset. Bayvarol also has a "friendly" label as pertaining to use alongside honey boxes, plus it was used heavily by authorities and beekeepers alike during the early stages of the varroa incursion which began June 2022.

"There has been a big reliance on Bayvarol and so there is disappointment this gene has been identified," Smith says.

While that may be the case, Taylor believes most beekeepers have followed a "logical progression" towards an IPM approach.

"They had a plan as an industry and, to their credit, they have moved to an IPM style rotation. If you take a step back and look at the industry as a whole, they have been adopting best practice and progressing step-change over time in a logical fashion," Taylor says.

"Unfortunately, in any industry, there is going to be a pocket of individuals who may have ruined it for everyone else."

### LESSONS FOR NEW ZEALAND

Avoiding that "ruin" in New Zealand should be the focus for Kiwi beekeepers and Smith calls the news out of Australia a "shot across the bows" on this side of the Tasman. While resistance to synthetic pyrethroids has been anecdotally suggested by some New Zealand beekeepers for several years, genomic testing has not identified the corresponding mutation in the varroa population.

No one has looked more closely than John Mackay, technical director at Gisborne lab dnature Diagnostics and Research. Coincidentally, in February, Mackay was the lead author on publication of an article detailing a new technique developed by their lab to test for such treatment resistance. That research saw more than 1000 varroa mites, collected from numerous regions around New Zealand, tested over an eight-year period for resistance to Bayvarol and Apistan. No resistance was found.

"The interesting thing about pyrethroid resistance is the major resistance found around the world is localised to three sequential

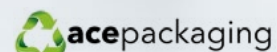
## Superior quality & lead times.

When it comes to export quality packaging for honey, Pharmapac is the industry leader.

Pharmapac is also Toitū Enviromark Diamond, Operation Clean Sweep, SMETA and ISO 9001:2015 certified.

Ask today about our **quick turnaround times and prompt delivery.**

Pharmapac, **second to none.**



Please ask about our new South Island distribution partner.

For more information about our delivery lead times, call us on +64 9 444 9631 or visit the website [pharmapac.co.nz](http://pharmapac.co.nz)

**pharmapac**<sup>™</sup>

DNA bases that make up one amino acid, which makes a protein. It's called L925. There are combinations, but the Australians have two of the three mutations present that we look for," Mackay explains.

He says that raises the question about whether the Australian varroa mutated to become pyrethroid resistant, "which would be remarkably quickly, even if just solely using one treatment," or have they had a new incursion, such as the AHBIC leadership are leaning towards.

Honey bee imports are not allowed into New Zealand, and a strict biosecurity regime is undertaken, minimising the risk of spread of Australia's pyrethroid resistant varroa across the Tasman. Therefore, if New Zealand's beekeepers rotate between varroa treatments, and follow label instructions, a mutated and resistant varroa should be avoided.

"Generally New Zealanders have used commercial products, of know efficacy, rotated treatments and used best practice. Now we are bringing in increased mite monitoring ... if those best practices are championed then I don't have any undue concern, due to our strict biosecurity," Mackay says.

Smith sees the consumption habits of Kiwi beekeepers through Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies' sales.

"The reason we are in reasonable shape here is the rotation of treatments has been good, and it needs to continue to be, combined with better on-label use. We hear some amitraz-amitraz back-to-back treatments are going on and that is something the industry should be careful of," the Ecrotek CEO says.

"All of us as beekeepers get in those situations where you get the dilemma, this is better for me right now, but this other option is better for the industry and avoidance of creating sub-lethal environments for varroa. We need to continue to choose the latter." 🐝



Australian Honey Bee Industry Council CEO Danny Le Feuvre says there is a "strong likelihood" that the recent discovery of synthetic pyrethroid resistant varroa is down to a new varroa population entering Australia.

## Varroa Investigation Fails

An investigation into the origin of Australia's varroa mite incursion, first identified in Newcastle, NSW, in June 2022, has failed to deliver answers the AUD\$264million beekeeping industry wanted to receive.

'Operation Decker', the federal government's final report on the matter, has been unable to uncover how and when varroa made its way to Australia.

"If we do not understand how varroa entered the country, it becomes far more difficult to ensure the same pathway cannot be exploited again," AHBIC chief executive Dann Le Feuvre says.

"For many in the industry this has been a devastating period. Colonies were destroyed, businesses disrupted and confidence in the biosecurity system shaken. The industry welcomed the investigation because we believed it would provide clarity. Instead, the final report confirms that the origin of the incursion remains unresolved."

AHBIC is calling on the Federal Government to take further action to ensure the investigation leads to meaningful improvements in Australia's biosecurity system.



## Protect your developing bees.

*Formic Pro*™ targets varroa mites under the brood cap, protecting your developing bees so you can build healthier, more productive colonies.

**Organic • No Resistance • Residue Free**



Order your *Formic Pro* from our New Zealand distributors:



# Will There be a Beekeeping Conference in Winter '26?



With the future of national-level industry groups up in the air, a void remains for an event venue and date to host a major beekeeping conference this winter. However, there appears to be a desire from beekeepers to gather and preliminary planning is underway, while the cloud of skyrocketing travel prices lingers.

**The winter conference has long been a staple of the Kiwi beekeeping calendar, and last off-season beekeepers were offered a range of get-togethers hosted in regions as spread as Bay of Plenty, Wellington and Christchurch. The previous winter Whanganui, Ashburton, Hamilton and Bay of Plenty provided the social settings. In the years prior, multi-day events hosted by Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) bounced between North and South Islands.**

As of early April, only Mānuka Orchard's open day on July 24 in Paengaroa has a set date. This year that is likely to be focused around their customers, making for a step back from their larger, open-door event last July.

Discussions between ApiNZ and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) are taking place to put together an event that would not only foster the usual beekeeping and honey industry discussions, trade displays and socialisation, but also provide a venue to advance a new industry body. Timelines for creation of that group are uncertain, but a gathering of beekeepers could provide a venue to further refine the constitution of the new group, or even implement it.

"People want an event and we want it to do something which fits what the whole industry wants ... we also want to fit it in with our aspirations to achieve a single, representative organisation setup," says Ian Fletcher, advisor to NZBI.

ApiNZ chief executive Karin Kos says the most common request from beekeepers recently, following any discussion about the new industry body proposal is, 'will there be a conference?'

"We would love to and it needs to be a joint event between NZBI and ApiNZ. We are having those discussions at the moment. It needs to be cost effective and it needs to work for beekeepers. Our concern is, with the Middle East conflict, flights and cost of travel. That will potentially be a constraint and we are very aware of it," Kos says.

With that last consideration in mind, NZBI president Jane Lorimer says she has been kicking the tires on the potential for a



*National beekeeping conferences in the past have featured large trade displays, such as this at the Rotorua Events Centre in 2021, and even drawn well over 1000 attendees. Any 2026 event will be much scaled back, with industry leaders in the early stages of planning a suitable event this winter despite uncertainty around travel costs.*



*The 2025 Honey Bee Research Symposium was held at Victoria University of Wellington and just under 100 people attended. Where it will be held this winter will likely depend on if it can be successfully scheduled alongside a larger industry-group planned conference.*

multi-venue, but audio-visually linked, series of beekeeping get-togethers on the same day.

"It might be a conference with a difference," Lorimer explains.

"If you can synchronise speakers through audiovisual link, and then organise groups to meet at several places so you are not just sitting at home via Zoom or Teams, then that might work."

In the past trade-displays have formed a major part of conferences though and such a spread attendance would limit their practicality and value.

Given the oil-supply uncertainties besetting the country, all options are still being considered at this early stage.

Like Mānuka Orchard, New Zealand Beeswax have hosted events in the past and, also like Mānuka Orchard, they are understood to be more than willing to step aside if an industry-body-centric event gets off the ground.

The now regular fixture of the New Zealand Honey Bee Research Symposium hopes to back for its seventh annual iteration to give scientists and beekeepers a place to connect. ApiNZ and NZBI are in close contact with the symposium planners and both are hoping to run their events in conjunction with one another to create "economies of scale". Dates in early-June or late-July are believed to be favoured by the symposium planning team.

So, there is very little set in stone but April is shaping as a key month for setting dates in the winter events calendar. Looming over it all is the uncertainty around travel costs and even potentially restrictions, but, if a combined ApiNZ-NZBI group can pull off an event to appease beekeepers, it can only help get any new industry body off on the right foot. 🐝

# WE'RE BUYING HONEY



Egmont Honey is proud to share New Zealand's finest honey with the world. You'll find us in the largest retail networks globally.

We're currently sourcing honey to fulfil contracts with the largest global retailers, **offering beekeepers reliable, long-term partnerships and attractive payment terms.**

We're contracting **new-season Mānuka honey now** - contact us today to secure your supply agreement.

**The Egmont Honey Team**

06 755 0548

[procurement@egmonthoney.co.nz](mailto:procurement@egmonthoney.co.nz)



# Expanding the Toolbox – Hornet Response Turns to Vespex and AI



Auckland's fight with yellow-legged hornets continues, with nests still being discovered as winter approaches. Despite ongoing eradication efforts and a strong public reporting effort, experts warn that even a single surviving queen could see the problem re-emerge next spring, making vigilance, now, more important than ever.

BY ELOISE MARTYN

**“What I would prefer is that we were not finding so many nests still,” says Phil Lester, Professor of Biology at the School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington. Lester’s research programme focuses on social insects – including honey bees, wasps, and ants – with a particular focus on protecting honey bee populations and managing invasive wasps.**

Lester’s comment comes in the context of the ongoing eradication programme for yellow-legged hornets, whose nests continue to appear on the North Shore in Auckland. The operation is being strengthened in the lead-up to winter in an attempt to get ahead of the hornets before next season.

“Right now, I was hoping people would be searching for hornets’ nests and not finding anything, unfortunately we are still finding things,” he says.

Lester does say, however, that it is encouraging to find no evidence of reproduction in new queens at this stage. But adds what is clear is that there are far more nests than were predicted or imagined, which is “not good”.



*Phil Lester, Professor of Biology at Victoria University of Wellington, has concerns at the number of yellow-legged hornets still being found in Auckland, with the potential for exponential growth in hornet colonies next spring.*

Biosecurity New Zealand’s Commissioner North, Mike Inglis says since the response started in November last year, 77 queens and 132 nests have been found and destroyed as of March 31 – “much of this thanks to an incredible effort from the public reporting sightings to us. We’ve had over 15,610 public notifications to date.”

Hornets have a life cycle that involves creating different types of nests. Early in the season, a hornet colony establishes a primary nest, usually small and on or near the ground. As the season progresses, the colony may move, building a larger secondary nest, often higher up in a tree.

The nests found thus far are a combination of both types. Up until December most of the nests found were primary nests. After December, both primary and secondary nests have been detected.

DNA testing confirms all hornets destroyed so far are from a single mother queen. With nests still being found as winter approaches, even one surviving queen could restart the problem next spring — and multiple survivors would make it grow exponentially.

“This is the critical bit,” Lester states. “Trying to stop queens reproducing this year, if one queen survives, we could be back to the exact same situation next year.”

He adds that the hornets thrive in Auckland’s mild climate, adding to the difficulty of eradication.

Lester is part of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that meets regularly with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

“We meet every few weeks, and they (MPI) frequently have questions they want to ask us. Some of the recent questions have been around Vespex – specifically, when and where it should be deployed.”

TAG is made up of experts with experience in wasp and hornet management from New Zealand as well as overseas, including Switzerland, the UK, and France.

“It’s a diverse group and it’s been hugely beneficial having them here,” Lester says, reflecting on the international insights.

He notes that some members of the group have recently made their second trip to New Zealand.

“Their visit has helped shape what, and how, our ground teams do. As a result of their input, the teams have become a lot more productive,” Lester says.

He calls Vespex, a fipronil-laced protein bait currently being used, "another tool in the toolbox". Having been effective against German and common wasps in New Zealand and overseas, we don't yet know for sure how effective it will be for hornets. However, "there's a good amount of evidence supporting its use," Lester points out.

Vespex is currently being used in two outer surveillance zones from 1km to 11km from known hornet hot-spots, as autumn moves closer to winter the poisonous bait is expected to be deployed into "Zone A" within 1km of hornet finds.

In the meantime the focus is on finding as many nests as possible to destroy them and Inglis adds that the response toolkit will soon be boosted with AI-enabled cameras to help monitor hornets. These cameras from the University of Exeter Vespa AI Team in Britain have arrived in the country and in April teams will be testing their effectiveness at locating areas of interest for hornets and their nests.

"The cameras have been used experimentally in the UK, and we are supporting this research by deploying them at live-capture feeding traps here in Auckland. They'll monitor hornet movements and help us pinpoint areas with high hornet activity." Inglis explains.

"Because we've now found and destroyed a substantial number of hornets and nests, our teams are spending longer observing feed stations. Using these cameras means we can closely monitor activity online, freeing up our field workers for other tasks."



**A Vespex bait station. The fipronil-laced protein bait has proven effective against common and German wasps species in New Zealand and now it is hoped it will kill off any hornet nests which are yet to be discovered in Auckland.**

Lester adds "It's another tool, and I'm really pleased to see MPI utilizing tools that have been effective overseas."

When asked what he thought the hornet situation might look like six months down the track, Lester replies, "I'm hopeful".

For now, the focus is on putting into action the tools and strategies learned from overseas. All beekeepers are encouraged to keep a watchful eye for any unwanted hornet visitors. Every report helps, and public vigilance remains a critical part of protecting New Zealand's honey bee populations. One thing is for certain: this is not where the yellow-legged hornets' New Zealand story ends just yet. 🐝

# Beequip<sup>NZ</sup>

Your Varroa Specialists

## Queen Isolation Cage 240

### Harness the power of Brood Breaks

When you force a brood break in your hive you can:

- Vaporize to kill near 100% of varroa mites
- Take control of swarming before it starts
- Push more bees onto the honey flow when it counts
- Minimise brood to ease strain on winter resources

With so many uses, these are an incredibly useful tool for the beekeeper - click the video to hear what they say!



New Design!



[Click to view a beekeeper's experience](#)



Give us a call  
+64 3 528 9404

[View here](#)



Visit our website  
[www.beequip.nz](http://www.beequip.nz)

# NZ Colony Loss Survey Results Revealed – Losses Climb as Varroa Bites



NZ Colony Loss Survey results are here and they confirm what many beekeepers suffered through in winter and spring 2025. We sit down with Survey lead and Bioeconomy Science Institute principal scientist Pike Stahlmann-Brown to dive into what beekeepers have said about winter losses.

**Apiarist's Advocate:** The 2025 NZ Colony Loss Survey results have just been released. What are the headlines from the latest survey?

**Pike Stahlmann-Brown:** The story on over-winter losses in 2025 is not so great, with an overall loss rate of 12.8%. This loss rate is similar to the 2023 loss rate of 12.7%, but it's up rather sharply from the 2024 loss rate of 10.8%. In 2024, we saw a big decline in colony losses due to varroa, but that was completely erased in 2025. In fact, we had more losses attributed to varroa over winter 2025 than in any previous year of the survey.

**AA:** That matches the anecdotal evidence, as queens and nucs were hot property in spring 2025 as beekeepers looked to recover. So, what was the loss rate to varroa in 2025?

**PSB:** Based on reports from about 2,000 beekeepers, 7.0% of all healthy, living colonies entering winter died because of varroa. In 2024, it was 4.6%. That's a big jump, and one that makes me worry where varroa losses are headed in the future.



Pike Stahlmann-Brown, author of New Zealand's Colony Loss Survey.

**AA:** Are beekeepers treating varroa any differently from in the past?

**PSB:** The use of formic acid, tau-fluvalinate, oxalic strips/staples, and oxalic sublimation/vaporisation were way up for commercial beekeepers – to the highest levels we have ever recorded. If people are using these products for the first time, there could be a bit of learning and experimentation taking place. I would note a couple of things, though. The first is that their use of amitraz and flumethrin was more or less unchanged since 2024. That means that commercial beekeepers are using a wider variety of treatments. The second is that when we asked commercial beekeepers how successful these treatments were, not a single treatment was widely perceived to be as effective as it was in 2024.

There's a similar story for hobbyist beekeepers: the use of formic acid, oxalic strips/staples, and oxalic sublimation/vaporisation were all up (not so for tau-fluvalinate), and the overall perceived effectiveness of most treatments was down.

**AA:** Are there any other stark results when comparing hobbyist and commercial beekeepers?

**PSB:** Just that loss rates attributed to varroa were about 26% higher among hobbyist beekeepers than commercials. We unpacked this a little bit and found that hobbyists are 3.5 times as likely as commercials to treat varroa only once during the season and 2.4 times as likely to use the same product every time they treated varroa.

**AA:** As I recall, the 2025 survey also asked about sources of beekeeping advice. What did that uncover?

**PSB:** This question had two parts to it: Do you believe that a given source has relevant information about beekeeping? If so (and only if so), how much do you trust that source of information? Hobbyists thought that peers/mentors, beekeeping clubs, and beekeeping magazines like *Apiarist's Advocate* were the most relevant sources of information, and they also had high trust in all of these sources (although they ranked New Zealand Bee Health & Biosecurity (NZBB) and scientists even higher in trust). Commercial beekeepers thought that peers/mentors, beekeeping magazines, and industry groups were the most relevant sources of information, and they thought that scientists, NZBB, and beekeeping magazines were the most trustworthy sources of information. On the other end of the

spectrum, websites, social media, and AI were perceived as being in the lower end of the trust spectrum.

**AA: Glad to hear it! But, what do you do with that information?**

**PSB:** I think it's important for potential sources of advice to know how they're perceived. Take scientists as an example: We're highly trusted as a source of information about beekeeping, but less than half of beekeepers think we have relevant information. It feels to me like we can do better in making scientific knowledge readily available.

Also, I recently attended the COLOSS meetings in Austria, and the international COLOSS monitoring group has decided to adopt a similar question. It will be useful to see how different sources of advice are perceived in different countries so we can learn good practices from one another.

**AA: You would be in your element there – what else was discussed at the COLOSS meetings?**

**PSB:** More than 42,000 beekeepers in various COLOSS member countries (including New Zealand) completed a colony loss survey in the last year. The results from the 2024/25 northern hemisphere winter haven't officially been released yet, so I won't go into too much detail, but suffice to say that our loss rate of 12.8% is envied by a lot of COLOSS countries, some of which experienced loss rates between 30% and 40%. Among 34 countries for which results were available, only one had lower loss rates than New Zealand.

After the COLOSS meetings, I met with the directors of the colony loss survey in the Czech Republic, because I think their surveys are among the best in the world. One reason is that they had over 9,000 beekeepers complete the winter 2024/25 survey, compared to fewer than 3,000 beekeepers the year before (meanwhile, our numbers have dropped a bit in recent years).

Another thing that they do really well is presenting results at a local level. Whereas we report loss rates for the Upper North Island, Middle North Island, and so on, they have been able to report at something closer to the postal code level. New Zealand Beekeeping Inc president Jane Lorimer raised the idea of doing something like this a few years ago, and I wanted to get some practical advice on how to make it work in New Zealand.

**AA: Fresh ideas raised ... sounds like a productive trip!**

**PSB:** It really was. On top of that, we're working on putting together some proposals for international funding to support research across countries. For example, there's a lot we need to know about how changing climate will affect floral resources and honeybee health, and we can lean into the COLOSS research network to improve outcomes for beekeepers everywhere.

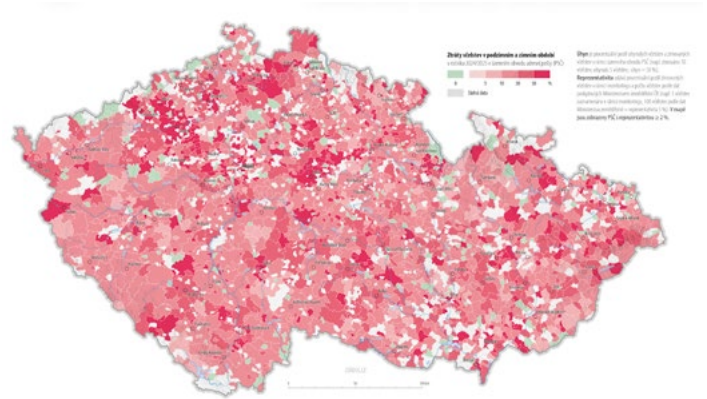
**AA: Ok we've covered a lot, but there is plenty more in the full NZ Colony Loss Survey 2025 results. Where can people get them? And is there anything else you want to add?**

**PSB:** Check out the neat infographic running alongside this story for an easy-to-consume look at the 2025 results, or visit the Ministry for Primary Industries website for a detailed data summary.

The NZ Colony Loss Survey evolves over time, so I'd like to ask the readers of *Apiarist's Advocate* to send me ideas for the next survey. I tasted some awesome mead when I was in the Czech Republic, and I brought two bottles of my favourite mead from

Kubešova back. One of them is for me, but I'll send the other bottle to the beekeeper who sends the best idea to surveys@landcareresearch.co.nz by 30 April 2026.

*The New Zealand Colony Loss Survey has been conducted annually since 2015 by the Bioeconomy Science Institute on behalf of the beekeeping industry and the Ministry for Primary Industries.* 🐝



*An illustration of "area-code" level colony loss reporting from Czech Republic. Should New Zealand report honey bee colony losses to this level? Email Pike Stahlmann-Brown at surveys@landcareresearch.co.nz with your thoughts, and any further ideas to improve the survey.*

# Got this message?...

AFB has been found within a 2km radius

## Use our AFB Foster Method to know your risk.



Contact **dnature** for your FREE AFB Sampling kit...

0800 362 887  
orders@dnature.co.nz  
[www.dnature.co.nz/testing/AFB](http://www.dnature.co.nz/testing/AFB)



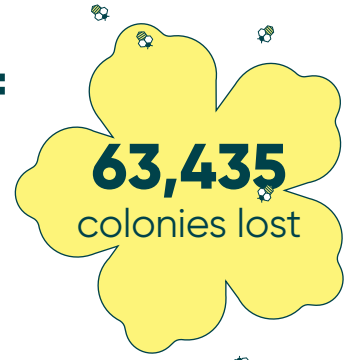
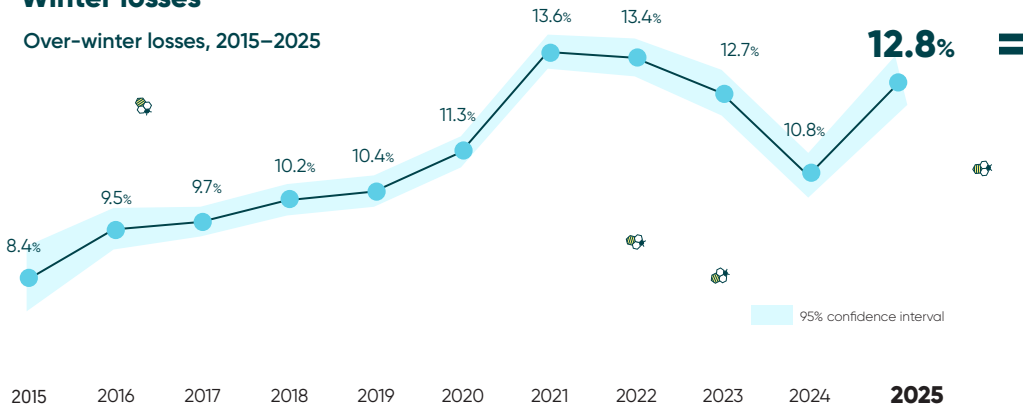
detect • discover

NEW ZEALAND COLONY LOSS SURVEY 2025 SURVEY

# Summary of results

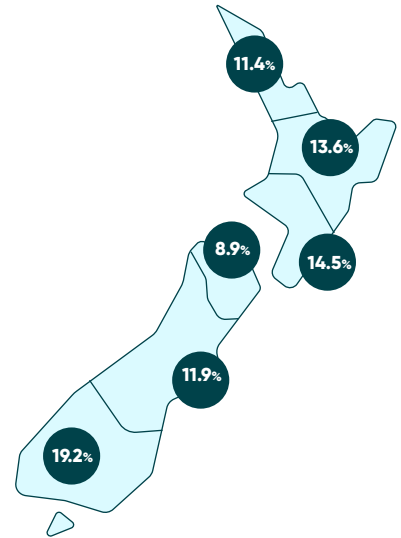
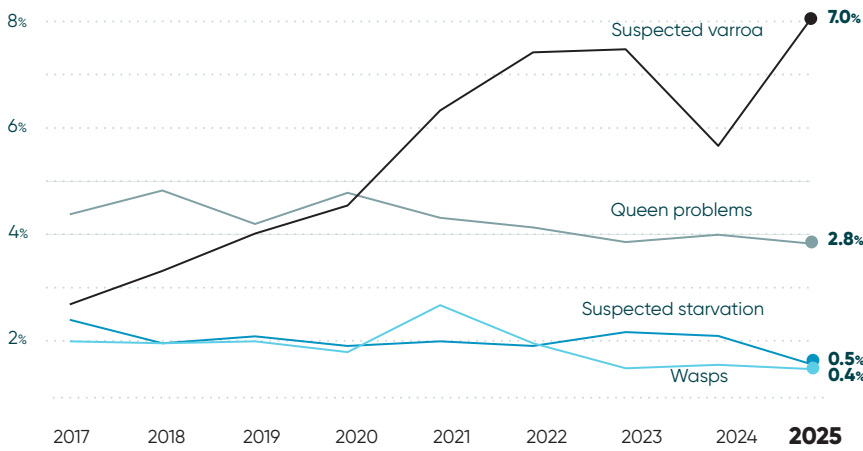
## Winter losses

Over-winter losses, 2015–2025



Average loss rates by region

Estimated percent of all living colonies entering winter lost to specific causes, 2017–2025



## Wasp control

Beekeepers who:

Controlled wasps



Directly killed wasp nests **41%**

Indirectly killed wasp nests (e.g. poison baits) **33%**

Trapped wasps **49%**

**12,200**  
wasp nests

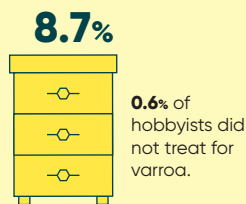


Estimated to have been killed by NZ beekeepers between spring 2024 and winter 2025.

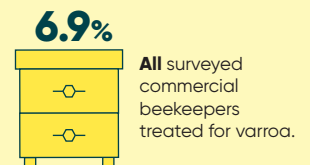
## Varroa management in 2025

Average over-winter varroa loss rates

Hobbyist (1–49 colonies)



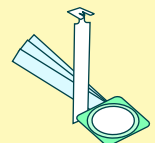
Commercial (50+ colonies)



Hobbyists are:

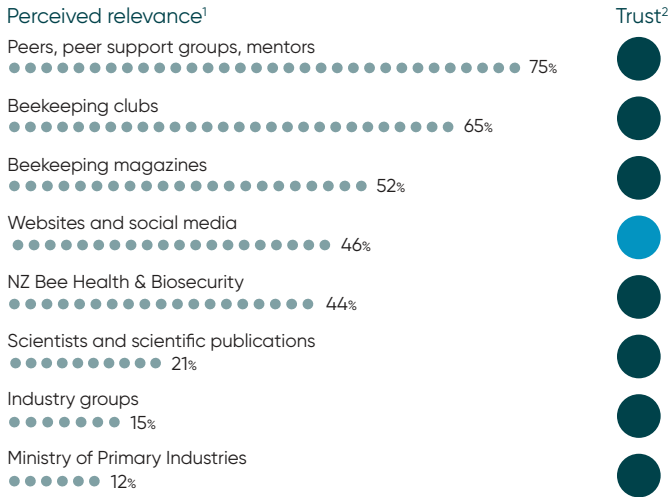
**3.5 times** as likely as commercial beekeepers to have treated varroa only once.

**2.4 times** as likely as commercial beekeepers to have used only one treatment type.

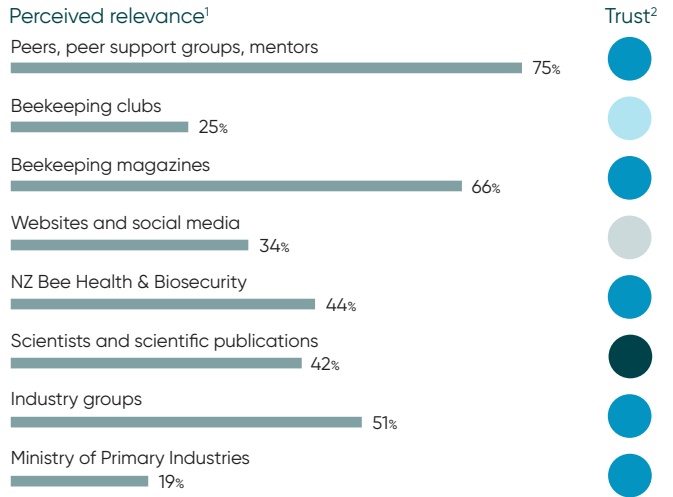


## Seeking advice

### Hobbyist beekeepers (1-49 colonies)

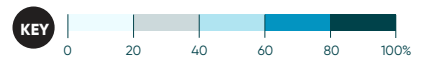


### Commercial beekeepers (50+ colonies)

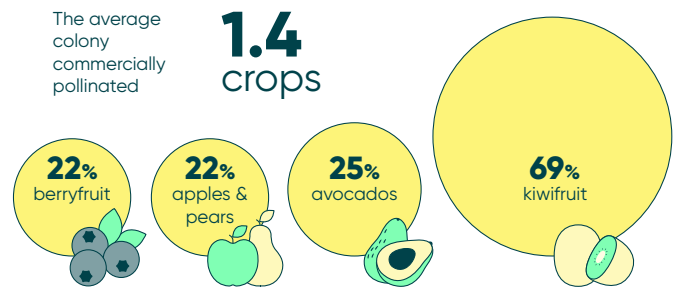
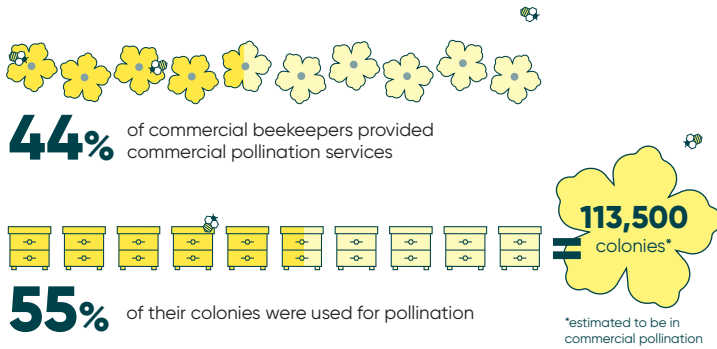


<sup>1</sup>Relevance – % Respondents who thought each source could provide advice for their beekeeping operation

<sup>2</sup>Trust – % Respondents who have high trust in the advice provided by the source (if they think the source is relevant)



## Pollination



### In a 'queen cell'

We surveyed 1,948 beekeepers, who collectively had 148,460 colonies. We estimate that 12.8% of New Zealand's colonies were lost in New Zealand during winter 2025. This means 63,435 colonies died over winter 2025, from a total of 495,587. This higher loss rate reverses recent trends of declining colony loss rates, although colony loss rates remain below their 2021 peak. As with the previous winter, loss rates over winter 2025 were highest in the Lower South Island.

Commercial beekeepers (50+ colonies) represent about 10% of all registered beekeepers and manage about 95% of all registered colonies. Hobbyist beekeepers (1-49 colonies) represent 77% of all registered beekeepers and manage 5% of all registered colonies. About 13% of registered beekeepers do not currently keep bees.

Higher loss rates were driven by varroa, which was estimated to cause the loss of 7.0% of all healthy, living colonies over winter 2025 (compared to 4.6% over winter 2024). Commercial beekeepers reported losing 6.9% of all colonies to varroa while hobbyist beekeepers reported losing 8.7%, a striking difference of 26%. Potential reasons for the higher loss rates to varroa among hobbyist beekeepers include not treating for varroa between spring 2024 and winter 2025 (0.6% of hobbyist beekeepers vs 0% of commercial beekeepers), treating once during this period (22% vs 6%), and using only one type of treatment (31% vs 13%).

Beekeepers attributed 0.4% of winter losses to wasps. Just under half of all beekeepers reported that they controlled wasps

between spring 2024 and winter 2025. Among them, 41% directly killed wasp nets (e.g. applying powdered insecticides at the nest entrance), 33% indirectly killed wasp nests (e.g. using poisoned baits that adult wasps carry back to the nest), and 49% reported trapping wasps using commercial or home-made traps. Five beekeepers estimated that they eliminated at least 500 wasp nests during the previous season!

The 2025 survey asked beekeepers about the relevance and trustworthiness of different sources of advice on beekeeping. Commercial beekeepers considered peers and mentors to be the most relevant sources of advice, followed by beekeeping magazines and industry groups. Hobbyist beekeepers considered peers and mentors to be the most relevant sources of advice, followed by beekeeping clubs and beekeeping magazines. For both groups, the most trusted source of advice were scientists and NZ Bee Health and Biosecurity.

### For more information

**Pike Stahlmann-Brown**  
E: brownp@landcareresearch.co.nz

Data summary commissioned by  
**Ministry for Primary Industries**

View additional results at:  
[www.landcareresearch.co.nz/bee-health](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/bee-health)



# Many More Opinions Needed – NZBB Advisory Group Consultation Lagging



With April 19 looming as the deadline for beekeepers to let their opinions be known on how advisory groups to New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity (NZBB) should be structured, hundreds more will need to respond if the default option is not to be guaranteed.

Consultation began February 16 but, as of March 30, just 101 beekeepers had responded to NZBB's call for feedback, with only 14 of those owners of more than 250 beehives.

"I am hoping that by sending a few more reminder emails out we will prompt a few more. Otherwise, it is dominated by beekeepers with less than 250 hives," NZBB chief executive Niha Long says.

NZBB has stated that unless at least 5% of registered beekeepers respond the default option of "technical" advisory groups being called on and selected by the board will be the chosen path. Other options include more beekeeper-led approaches such as a beekeeper-technical expert group where beekeepers can self-nominate and be selected by the board; the "stakeholder and technical AG" option where beekeeping industry groups nominate representatives to sit alongside technical experts; or simply a stakeholder nominated group of beekeepers.


To reach the 5% threshold 378 beekeepers would need to contribute.

So far one thing is for certain – "Everyone who has responded has responded positively about having an advisory group," Long reports.

NZBB's role is to help beekeepers eliminate American foulbrood from managed colonies, and the advisory group, or groups, are to be made up of volunteers. They would be tasked with helping come up with new ideas for AFB elimination, weighing in on ideas proposed by the board, and helping build connection to wider beekeeping networks, among other topics.

The lack of input from commercial beekeepers is concerning Long says.

"We need to hear from everyone, but generally when we get consultation we hear from hobbyists. I have no problem with that. Hobbyists hold an important viewpoint and are an enduring part of the industry, but we often don't hear much from commercials and it is important that we consider what an industry advisory group means to them and what value they see in it," Long says.

**Registered beekeepers should have received email or mail advising of the consultation and all the details can be found on their website [here](#).** 

## WANT YOUR EXISTING PRICKER TO BE BETTER?

Save time and money and get more honey.

WE CAN HELP!

### CONVERT TO OUR PROVEN STAINLESS STEEL NEEDLES

- Every cell 100% pricked
- No more costly needle replacing
- Sterilization with heat now possible
- Time and yield losses eliminated
- Every cell now releasing honey

**ORDER NOW**

Call Logan Bowyer 027 667 7588  
Email Logan [logan.bowyer@manukaengineering.com](mailto:logan.bowyer@manukaengineering.com)  
[www.manukaengineering.com](http://www.manukaengineering.com)

  
**MANUKA ENGINEERING**  
Innovation is everything

## NEED MORE FROM YOUR HONEY?

Battling high moisture or fermented drums?

WE CAN HELP!

### TALK TO US ABOUT BULK HONEY STORAGE & SERVICES:

- Growth storage
- Chilled storage
- Ambient storage
- Honey sampling
- Honey moisture reduction
- Fermented pressure release
- Extraction
- Batch Blending to 20Ton



**Call Logan or Tania Bowyer**

Phone: 027 6677 588

or email: [thehive@manukaorchard.com](mailto:thehive@manukaorchard.com)  
[www.manukaorchard.com](http://www.manukaorchard.com)

# Workshops on Selecting for Varroa-Resistant Bees Coming this Winter



Breeding for varroa-resistant bees using the varroa sensitive hygiene (VSH), or other traits, in New Zealand's honey bee stocks is essential if Kiwi beekeepers are to conquer varroa, believe the Bee Breeding NZ Group (formerly NZ Bee Breeders Association). The team formed in 2022 and is headed by Ashburton beekeeper Rae Butler with Dr Linda Newstrom-Lloyd as science adviser. This winter they are inviting beekeepers to educational workshops in both the North and South Islands as they strive to help the industry take a big step forward in advancing varroa resistance.

## BY BEE BREEDING GROUP NZ (BBGNZ)

**The workshops will teach new and improved practical beekeeping skills and strategies to combat varroa mites by increasing the levels of varroa-resistant bees in your stock. Locations and dates will be confirmed based on demand.**

Much has been learned since the 2023 workshop. Our practical tools and current strategies draw on three years of successful field testing of new methods, as well as on studying international successes through consultations, networking, webinars, and the global scientific literature.

The aim of these one-day workshops is to provide practical technology transfer based on Rae's field experience. Choosing varroa-resistant bees can quickly reduce the need for varroa treatments and greatly improve honeybee health in your colonies. This will decrease beekeeping costs and help prevent colony losses.



*Ashburton beekeeper Rae Butler will lead several workshops, this winter, to help further education into breeding honey bees for varroa resistance. Beekeepers are invited to register their interest now.*

The workshop is suitable for all beekeepers, from small-scale to commercial operations, as well as queen breeders and producers who want to learn field methods and selection strategies for identifying and selecting varroa resistance traits in bees. Whether you are purchasing or producing resistant bee stock, this workshop will help you understand how to evaluate the levels of varroa resistance in your bees and provide the tools to retain, sustain, and increase those levels. The long-term goal is to minimise the need for varroa treatments and ultimately establish widespread bee populations that do not require varroa treatments at all.

### At the workshop, you will learn how to:

- Find, measure, and select for varroa resistance in your own colonies by:
  - making field observations in your colonies
  - using mite monitoring thresholds and trend lines
  - testing for resistance using the most suitable methods



## Bee Breeding NZ Group Workshops

Register Now

Advance your knowledge on breeding for varroa resistance: Workshops - held in both the North & South Islands in July - Locations confirmed once interest levels are known.

### REGISTER

Please indicate your preferred location when registering. Possible locations include Hamilton, Napier, Gisborne, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

Once locations are confirmed, a \$50 registration fee will secure your place.

### REGISTER YOUR INTEREST NOW

[www.bbnzg.co.nz/register](http://www.bbnzg.co.nz/register)

More information ph Rae Butler 027 430 1106 or [www.bbnzg.co.nz](http://www.bbnzg.co.nz)

- Introduce high-performing varroa-resistant queens into your colonies by:
  - purchasing or accepting exchanges from reliable sources
  - using consumer awareness when buying varroa-resistant queens
  - checking if the resistance is expressed in the next generations
- Maintain and increase the levels of resistant bees in your operation by:
  - continuing to test and select daughters from high-performing queens
  - keeping desirable beekeeping traits while selecting for resistance
  - using the Harbo Quick Test for greater accuracy and speed in selecting queens
  - employing the Harbo Scoring System and Confidence Grades
- Accelerate your breeding programs and selection methods by:
  - keeping good records to track varroa-resistant queens and their drones
  - exploring options for advanced breeding techniques and strategies
  - considering the advantages of instrumental insemination if desired
  - understanding the use of open versus closed mating and drone saturation

Importantly, these breeding efforts must also retain the productive traits beekeepers rely on, including honey production, temperament, colony strength, and overwintering ability. To do this, you can focus on selecting for varroa-resistance traits in your highest-performing bee stock at the same time as you are conducting your normal everyday operations, such as honey production or pollination services.

Breeding for varroa resistance can be undertaken individually or collectively; regardless of your approach, it is an ongoing opportunity for all beekeepers to combat mite infestations. New Zealand is well-positioned to implement various strategies that lead to the widespread selection of varroa-resistant bees. The benefits of selection programs will spread as the frequency of resistance alleles (genetics) increases across New Zealand's bee populations.

Full-day workshops will be held in both the North and South Islands in July, with locations confirmed based on registered interest and possibly including Hamilton, Napier, Gisborne, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

While costs are subsidised by the Honey Industry Trust, a \$50 registration fee remains.

**Registration can be made [here](#).**

**Email Rae Butler at [runny.honey@extra.co.nz](mailto:runny.honey@extra.co.nz) for any questions about the workshops or call 027 430 1106.** 🐝

**Bactobee**  
By Vétô-pharma

## LIVE PROBIOTICS FOR THRIVING HONEY BEES

Minimum  
**1x10<sup>10</sup>**  
**CFU**  
per  
application



### 1 Unique, science-backed formula

Unlike other probiotics that rely on dried fermentation products, Bactobee® is based on live, active bacteria. It features *Pediococcus acidilactici*, a proven strain with remarkable benefits for honey bee colonies.

### 2 Tailored for honey bees

Specifically designed to meet the unique needs of honeybees, Bactobee® promotes good gut health, stabilizes microbiota, supports immune function, improves colony performance, and boosts winter survival.

### 3 Helps bees overcome environmental stressors

Whether facing pesticide exposure, adverse weather, limited food resources, or migratory beekeeping, Bactobee® helps bees stay strong and healthy through life's toughest challenges.

**NEW**

PESTICIDE



ADVERSE WEATHER



LIMITED FOOD RESOURCES



MIGRATORY BEEKEEPING



**Healthy bees start with a healthy gut!**

Visit [www.veto-pharma.com](http://www.veto-pharma.com) or scan the QR code to learn more!



Exclusively distributed in New Zealand  
by New Zealand Beeswax Ltd:  
+64 (0)3 693 9189 - [info@beeswax.co.nz](mailto:info@beeswax.co.nz) - [www.beeswax.co.nz](http://www.beeswax.co.nz)  
Registered pursuant to the ACVM Act 1997 No. CD-0000001003



# Don't Get Caught Out This Spring



Pyramid Apiaries

**PREORDER NOW  
MATED QUEENS – SOLD OUT  
5-FRAME NUCS – ORDER NOW  
CELLS – ORDER NOW, PICKUP ONLY**



**MATED QUEENS | 5-FRAME NUCS | QUEEN CELLS**



Patrick & Laura Dawkins – Marlborough  
pyramid.apiaries@gmail.com  
027 383 7278  
www.pyramidapiaries.co.nz



# How do You Manage Varroa? – Beekeepers Asked to Aid Research



New Zealand beekeepers are being urged to have their say on one of the industry's most persistent and costly challenges – varroa. A new nationwide survey, led by Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme participant and Comvita operations manager Robbie O'Brien, aims to capture real-world insights into how the mite is being managed on the ground. He's asking beekeepers to take five minutes to complete the anonymous survey in the hope his research can help shape practical, industry-led solutions.

**BY ELOISE MARTYN**

**For Robbie O'Brien, being involved in the apiculture industry wasn't just a career choice, it was a natural fit.**

"I like being outside and what I saw was that beekeeping, over any other job, was diverse. You can be in a different farm each day—and who doesn't like honey? Honey is amazing," he says.



*Comvita beekeeper Robbie O'Brien is the latest from the apiculture industry to undertake the Kellogg Leadership Programme and as part of his research he will need help from beekeepers to gain insights into their varroa management habits.*

O'Brien's journey began during a university holiday break, helping a Whanganui beekeeper harvest honey. What started as a hands-on experience soon developed into something much deeper. Over time, he became fascinated with bees – tiny yet powerful creatures with complex social structures, a tireless work ethic, and a vital role in sustaining our environment.

He has since obtained a National Certificate in Apiculture (Level 4) and has built extensive hands-on experience across the industry. Now, nearly 11 years into beekeeping with Comvita, he is no stranger to the apiculture industry and, as an operations manager, his role is broad and practical – overseeing operations, supporting team deployments, promoting a strong health and safety culture, and managing land access and logistics. He works closely with field teams and is often out on the ground himself, assessing hive sites and determining how many hives each property can sustainably support.

As part of his current Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, he's turning his attention to one of the biggest ongoing challenges facing beekeepers: varroa.

O'Brien has developed a short, anonymous survey (taking around five minutes) to explore how varroa is currently being monitored and managed across New Zealand. The aim is simple but important – to better understand what beekeepers are doing, the challenges they face, and where there may be opportunities to strengthen long-term control.

He's calling on beekeepers nationwide to take part.

"Your input would be extremely valuable to the research," O'Brien says.

Importantly, he stresses that the survey isn't about solving varroa outright. Instead, it's about building a clearer picture. By gathering insights from across the industry, he hopes to identify ways beekeepers can work more collaboratively and consistently to reduce colony losses.

"You can have one beekeeper on one side of the fence with an amazing varroa plan, yet the other beekeeper on the other side doesn't know what he's doing."

Before launching the survey, he undertook a literature study on varroa – reviewing existing research, scientific papers, and trusted sources to better understand what is already known about the mite and its impact on bees. This groundwork, combined with real-world insights from beekeepers, will help shape his final recommendations.

Alongside the survey, O'Brien is also conducting interviews to dive deeper into varroa management practices at different levels. He says hearing perspectives from beekeepers at all stages is incredibly valuable and welcomes anyone interested in taking part.

Once the survey closes, results will be analysed alongside interview feedback and existing research to form recommendations. He emphasises that these are not intended as rules or requirements, but as informed insights that could help guide the industry forward.

This is an opportunity for beekeepers to contribute to something bigger, with the potential to help build a more connected, informed, and resilient approach to varroa management in New Zealand.

**Take the survey [here](#).**

**Or get in touch directly to take part in an interview:**  
[robbieobrien@gmail.com](mailto:robbieobrien@gmail.com)

**Both the survey and interview opportunity will remain open until Tuesday 21 April.** 🐝



# Some Awkward Phone Calls – Advice on Getting Honey Samples Tested



Honey testing labs don't always get it right, in Mark Goodwin's experience, but there are tricks to confirming results accurately represent your honey.

BY DR R. MARK GOODWIN

As science advances, so does what we can test beehives and bee products for. This might include varroa control chemical residues, mānuka honey standards, and American foulbrood (AFB). We fill out a form and send the sample to a lab and assume the results we get back are correct. There is a potential flaw with this assumption. Personally, I have encountered some difficult situations when I have had to get samples tested.

## 1080-180

The first was when New Zealand beekeepers had an issue with bees foraging on 1080 jam baits laid for possum control. A beekeeper was worried that his honey crop had been contaminated with 1080. I pointed out that the cells in colonies poisoned with 1080 were green because of the green dye in the baits. These green cells usually tested at about 2parts-per-million, and as his extracted honey was not green. If there were 1080 residues, it would be far below the detectable level. I sent a sample to the lab analysing 1080 residues, to keep him happy. I was incredibly surprised when the results came back as 2ppm 1080. I rang the lab with my concerns, and they said they would have another look at it. About a week later I, and everyone else who had had honey samples tested over the previous two years received a letter to say they had made a mistake with the testing, and all the samples would be retested. They retested my beekeeper sample, which now came back as negative.



*Beekeepers should be wary of taking honey test results as gospel warns renown honey bee scientist Mark Goodwin, and sending known samples in occasionally can act as an easy audit.*

## FALSE-POSITIVE

On another occasion clients asked me to use a commercial lab for residue testing for the trials I was doing for them as it was cheaper than using our labs. Whenever I did this, I also always added samples I knew were positive and others I knew were negative. The



For more information contact Stuart Fraser on  
021 855 347 or email [stuart@fraserconsulting.co.nz](mailto:stuart@fraserconsulting.co.nz)

**Kōpani**<sup>™</sup>  
Pallet Cover



first time I did this, one of my negative samples tested positive. I had to make another one of those difficult phone calls. They said they would retest the sample at my cost if the sample was still positive, and at their cost if it was negative. As it turned out to be negative this time, I didn't have to pay for it, and I got the lab, at their cost, to retest all the samples to make sure those results were correct.

#### UN SOUND WASHDOWN

On another occasion I asked one of my technicians to make the positive sample, but they made a concentration that was higher than it should have been. When I got all the results back, the lab had identified the positive control correctly; however, the next highest result was in the next sample tested, and the concentrations decreased with each further sample tested. I had to have another one of those difficult phone calls and get the samples retested. There was obviously a problem with the clean up between samples.

#### RADIATION FRUSTRATION

In a further example, I was talking to a beekeeper who wanted some equipment irradiated in New Zealand because it might have been contaminated with AFB. I provided some AFB spores to be irradiated at the same time, and I was sure they would be killed as irradiation is physics rather than chemistry. I was very

surprised when the spores were alive when they came back, and I had to make another one of those phone calls. It may have been a coincidence, but a manager for an Australian irradiation plant said that sometime after my phone call, the New Zealand plant was shut down, and all medical equipment was sent to Australia to be irradiated for about six months.

I may have just been very unlucky that every time I went to an outside agency for testing or treatment, the parties got it wrong. Interestingly, it was probably not just my samples, and other people may have incorrect test results they didn't know about.

In conclusion, if you are submitting samples ask the lab if they routinely test positive and negative samples as part of their own quality assurance programme. Even if they are, it is good practice to always include several samples that you already know what the results are. If they were tested previously, it is best to keep the sample in the freezer until you want to have them tested again. Alternately you can make up positive and negative samples to act as controls for the testing. That way, you can have confidence in the results.

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

# Honey drums

## New Zealand manufactured

## Ex-stock Christchurch and Auckland



Stable pricing  
for the whole  
season



Available ex-stock  
Christchurch  
and Auckland  
warehouses



No minimum  
quantities



NZ made  
in Auckland  
and Temuka



Stowers service -  
national sales and  
customer service



delivery  
NZ wide



Closed top / Open  
top / DG Drums

### Contact Stowers

sales@stowers.co.nz  
0800 082 000  
www.stowers.co.nz



# From Teamwork to Dreamworks



We refer to a 'bird's-eye-view', but the latest technology is increasingly making a 'bee's-eye-view' better understood to researchers, thus improving knowledge of the movements of our honey bees. Dave Black views the videos – and you can too! – to assess this technology's value to beekeepers, scientists and even hornet-hunters.

BY DAVE BLACK

The ink had hardly dried on the page for **last month's exploration about drones and tracking technology** when I found a pre-publication article about the latest equipment. The paper, actually published on March 9<sup>1</sup>, combines some fancy, advanced optical tracking with drone robotics to observe wild insect behaviour over several kilometres. The system, called Fast Lock-On (FLO) tracking was first proposed in 2024 by a team at Freiburg's University in Germany<sup>2</sup>, a development of six year's work.

Tracking small things can be 'active', in which case they have to be able to carry a portable (battery-containing) transmitter, or 'passive', in which case they must be able to reflect light, (or another electromagnetic transmission) back for an observer to see it. Each method has advantages and disadvantages, but the important feature is range. A small insect can't carry much, so the range is usually limited, but in theory if there is a device that can follow the insect closely you could actually track the device and not the insect itself, and your device can carry a heavier transmitter.

Tracking, after all, is really just 'watching'. When things are small and moving, the resolution of your eye or camera starts to matter, and you have to be able to focus and move (the camera) continuously. Computers can do that quite quickly, better than

people, but it's necessary to simplify the image as much as possible to allow them to manage the movement bit without being overwhelmed by calculating with data from up to 1000 images per second.

## FLO – FROM GOLF TO INSECTS

FLO tracking uses a camera to determine the location of a specific object and then follows it. If you watch golf or nature programmes you will know how well these systems can work. To use the system for following something as small as an insect you use a bright paint marker, or better, a 'retroreflector' (like the 'cat's-eye' in the middle of the road) so the subject is easy to pick out from the background which, for tracking purposes, is irrelevant. FLO tracking monitors the position of the object it has 'locked-on' and steers the camera to keep it 'locked' to the image. So, when the camera is on a drone (a quadcopter UAV), the drone will follow the bright image produced by the marked insect. Drones can fly a long way and are easily tracked; it's routine for a drone to 'know' its position using GPS satellites.

The Freiburg team produced several videos including one following a honey bee flying from a release point in a field back to its hive. Because there can be more than one camera 'on board', the system display can show different live views simultaneously; one of a position on a map, a full colour view of the landscape covered, and a 'bee's-eye' point-of-view. If you follow the references list below, or at [this link](#), you can check out the videos yourself.

The radio tagging equipment available as used in Auckland costs about €2400, plus taxes and shipping (about NZD4,700), for a kit including transmitter (5), receivers (3), charger, power supply, a scale, and various tools, jars and so on. So, not particularly expensive. A reasonable estimate suggests that the tags have a range of about 250m-500m, and that can be increased by using a drone relay to about 800m. Surprisingly, the



*A grab from a FLO-tracking video in Germany where a drone has videoed a honey bee flight. The new technology opens up new avenues for researching bee movements.*

FLO tracking equipment costs are not dissimilar, but it isn't a handy pre-prepared, kit-set-in-a-box – yet. Its imaging is a great improvement on harmonic radar, the data is three-dimensional, and the drone will steer around anything blocking its view and stay on-target. The system (accidentally) detected two flights at least 900m long, but in this study tracking distance was not the point.

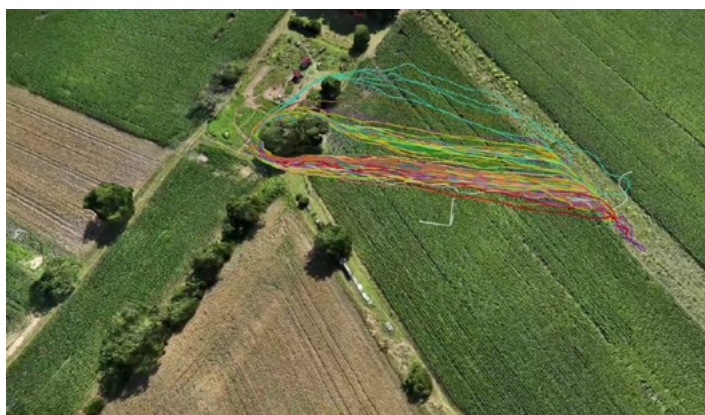
### A TOOL FOR HORNET HUNTING?

The range of both, for the purpose of hornet tracking, is constrained by something more mundane, the world of property rights. Racing along behind, hurdling fences and scaling buildings at the pace of a world-class marathon runner isn't on the cards for hornet-chasers, and that's why the radio kit supplies three receivers. The tracking acers can follow and use a vehicle, handing off to a colleague with another receiver before it goes out of range. Nor can I imagine watching a UAV following a hornet through Auckland's back-yards and streets five or six metres off the ground. Despite what some scientists think, UAVs do not enjoy 'unrestricted mobility'.

### PLOTTING UNIQUE, BUT PRECISE PATHS

In natural landscapes or large agricultural spaces the new system looks very promising. In the paper just published the Freiburg scientists used the system to follow 255 flights to and back from a feeder positioned 122m away from a hive in a maize field. They were interested in the kind of navigational strategies the bees would use, landmarks, the path(s) they had travelled, a mental 'map', or vectors relative to something like the sun. They found the routes the twenty-six bees travelled were all very individual. Each bee used visual information differently, and will have selected a different strategy to suit various parts of the trip.

Generally, the bees seemed to be using a vector (an angle) outbound to the feeder, so the specific route could meander because the destination was invariable. They could take different paths around a tree, for example. Each bee had its route, but it wasn't always the same one. Inbound flights (homeward) were much more consistent, straighter, nearly always the route the bee had used last time, and a lower altitude. Any route was more consistent when there was a landmark. Part of the reason homeward flights were more consistent maybe because the bees were very familiar with 'landmarks' at the hive. Going home, even if they were using a memory of their outbound path, they could at least correct it because they could see the right landmarks.



*Plotted movements of field bees from hive (at left) to a feeding station (far right) as generated by using video tracking technology.*

The flight data revealed very precise navigation, far more precise than honey bee's notoriously error-prone waggle dancing might suggest. However, their individuality, and the range of possible landscape permutations, suggest that even with highly capable tracking equipment it will be a very difficult thing to investigate well. In this particular report the landscape was, well, pretty local and uncomplicated, and that is probably reflected in the behaviour they found. It might still be great to develop its use on those pesky hornets though. Tracking could be as fun as a video game!

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

### REFERENCES

1. Stentiford, R., Harrap, M.J.M., Titov, V.V., Lochner, S., Straw, A.D., 2026. Precise, individualized foraging flights in honeybees revealed by multicopter drone-based tracking. *Current Biology* S0960982226000849. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2026.01.045>
2. High Resolution Outdoor Videography of Insects Using Fast Lock-On Tracking, 2024. T. Thang Vo-Doan, Victor V. Titov, Michael J.M. Harrap, Stephan Lochner, Andrew D. Straw. *Science Robotics* 9. <https://doi.org/10.1126/scirobotics.adm7689>



**CrystechNZ**  
Extraction | Processing | Packaging

## Honey processing and extraction equipment

From initial consultations, layout plans through to tipping the first drum, as well as ongoing servicing and maintenance, our team become your partner along the way.





Contact us to discuss your solution on  
**07 579 0082** or visit [www.crystech.co.nz](http://www.crystech.co.nz)



# Breathing Room



The hum of the honey processing room. Clack-hiss, whoosh goes the pricker. The extractor puts a spin on the ambience, a see-saw of whirring noises. Trolleys, boxes, buckets moved around amid the roar of the centrifuge. Radio. Banter. Fans and fly-swats. The heat. The heavy, pungent smell of honey.

## All a memory. Now my footsteps echo through the honey room.

Time for a breather.

The steam cleaner has been out for a blast, and 101 tasks involving sorting and cleaning, sing out from stacks of boxes, calling for rainy days.

Our hives are home and have had a preliminary check to make sure none were starving and that each had a laying queen. They are in tip-top form. Knackered ones were few and far between, and the majority of the sites were heavy, with good honey stores around the brood.

And brood there is, some wall to wall. Healthy, uniform cells, and circular patterns of eggs and young grubs, these will be our winter bees. Our biggest threat this year will be starvation, as the mites are nowhere to be seen.

Oxalic acid has been our saving grace. I will remember the destruction wreaked by varroa for the rest of my life, but we survived and came out stronger for it. Mite control timing is everything – on the ball, all of the time.

Our autumn splits are looking great with their recently hatched queens. A handful of colonies were unsuccessful, but the rest are healthy, strong, three-quarter boxes of brood and bees. We are

getting a jump on spring with around 120 of our own overwintered queens.

A pre-emptive play, as economic uncertainty puts pressure on us all to become more self-sustainable. Conservation of fuel and resources is the big issue we are facing at this time, so considerate planning of beekeeping missions is a top priority to keep running costs down.



*Aimz and her brothers pause for a family pic with Dad. Finally some 'breathing room' in the season.*



*Oxalic acid sublimation helps stay on top of the varroa mites. Once bitten, twice shy.*



Unsettled times call for resilience and a bit of faith. As beekeepers, we all possess strength and fortitude in liberal amounts. Some days we need to dig deep, but all the better to anchor ourselves and those around us.

At least we are winding down and readying for winter. Entrance reducers are on all hives to protect from wasps and cold draughts. Our queen rearing units have had their first taste of sugar, hopefully packing it away while bee numbers are still bulging. Ribbonwood is flowering, and broom and Spanish heath are just beginning, maintaining a trickle of stores into the colonies.

Home calls. Drums of honey are doing their thing in the warm room. The wax melter is still chugging on, churning out alternate liquid gold from scraped out honey frames. Domestic jobs start getting checked off, rehangng gates, painting doors and spreading fertilizer to fill in a day.

And of course, school holidays are upon us again. For conservations sake, why take the kids to the movies when you can bring them beekeeping?

Keep cool out there fellow beeks. Enjoy, and encourage each other. Take the breathing room.

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. 🐝*



*Hard at work on the koromiko, the honey bee and beekeeper's friend late in the season.*

## Want to tell beekeeping stories and earn some extra income?

Apiarist's Advocate is searching for freelance writers to contribute to our monthly eMagazine.

If you have skill with the written word and an understanding of beekeeping and the apiculture industry, then we want to hear from you.

**Ph. Patrick 027 383 7278 or email  
editor@apiadvocate.co.nz**

# Airborne®

SINCE 1910

## BECOME AN AIRBORNE SUPPLIER.



CONTACT BEV, IAN, JOHN:  
Email bev@airborne.co.nz or ian@airborne.co.nz  
Phone 03 3243569 | www.airborne.co.nz



# Diesel, Drugs and Data



The war between the US, Iran and Israel continues to disrupt globally. Ian Fletcher assesses how New Zealand is being impacted, how we might be impacted by similar events in the future, and what we are doing about it.

BY IAN FLETCHER

**Last month I predicted – perhaps rashly – that the fighting in the Iran war would be over by Easter, but that the subsequent disruption would take some months to work through. Well, I may be proved wrong about Easter (though the Orthodox Easter on 12 April might yet be a decent better bet). But the resulting anxiety in New Zealand about fuel stocks and how to respond to a looming shortage has made me look at the physical risks New Zealand faces when things go awry overseas.**

It is often said, but not often really understood, that we are a trading nation. At that point the debate skips on to focus on exports, and market access, and trade missions – all about what we sell.

This avoids the focus on what we import. Which is just about everything we need to live as we do, and then things we need to produce what we are able to export. Covid exposed some of these challenges, but not all. What are the things we import that we really can't do without? There seem to me to be three: diesel, drugs and data.



*Just about everything we need to live as we do in New Zealand is imported, with few things more important to that than diesel and petrol.*

## DIESEL

The debate in recent days has shown a growing realisation that we depend to a very great extent on diesel for the whole food and goods distribution system, as well as emergency vehicles, rural production, trains, ferries and so on. Rudolf Diesel's first patent for this sort of engine was in 1892. And we still totally depend on it.

As we all now know from the sterile debate about who is to blame for the closure of Marsden Point as a refinery, we can no longer make diesel fuel in New Zealand. In recent years we get ours from Korea, and other Asian refiners. The current dilemma will be repeated every time supplies are seriously disrupted (and this war won't be the last).

There are two risks: sustained high prices, and (at worst) no diesel at any price. High prices are here now, and will lead to a recession. The Government is now looking to invest in storage (which creates resilience if shipments are irregular) and is hinting at 'allocation'. That means rationing. Investing in storage is a good idea: fuel companies have no interest in resilience beyond a minimum. They benefit from higher prices. In fact, current pump prices are a toxic compound: the rising price of crude oil, plus the rising costs of shipping and marine insurance, plus the (rising) refiner's margin, all adjusted by the exchange rate (which is falling, unsurprisingly).

Allocation – rationing – would (or maybe will) be a nightmare. So much of the economy is so transport dependent that it would bring normal life to a halt. If I were in Government, I would want to do almost anything to avoid this outcome. As it is, high prices will be sustained for some time (whenever the shooting stops), and a recession is now likely. For the future, electrification of transport (where possible) seems sensible, but will require a big investment in the grid and in generation. If I were Labour, that would be my manifesto in November's election. It would reduce but not end diesel dependence.

Standing back, what else is a serious risk we haven't really considered?



## DRUGS

Legal ones: medication. We import them. Imagine life without antibiotics, anaesthetics, cancer or heart and blood pressure drugs. Or vaccines. Pharmac (the drug import agency) takes resilience seriously and on their published plans can probably manage around a two-month disruption (actually their plans look a lot better than the fuel disruption planning). But drugs are supplied through complex global supply chains, with the so-called Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) made in a few places, with a lot of exposure to China. So, disruption in trade with China, or prolonged disruption in China itself, is a big risk, although with only low-medium probability. There's also exposure to APIs made in India, and elsewhere. But I'm moderately reassured that Pharmac is alive to these risks, and has plans that would help manage things, as far as we can.

## DATA

The other risk is data – the internet. So much of our economy and social life is organised, managed and conducted online that a significant loss of access or function would be very hard to manage. And a very large amount of what we do is managed offshore – big email systems, all social media (though loss of social media would be a win), and anything that relies on cloud storage.

Here, we are exposed to disruption but the situation is improving over time. Both the laying of extra submarine cables, and the recent development of big data storage in New Zealand means that our resilience (which I would assess as having been low) is getting better. If we see connectivity via Australia as a positive,



At times of war New Zealand is at risk of having its internet connectivity to the world disrupted, but there are contingency measures being put in place.

then that's improving too, with an extra cable planned over the next few years.

Cables are vulnerable to sabotage in the event of war or near-war conflict (as we have seen in the Baltic in recent years). In the event of disruption, access to cable repair ships is a strategic asset. They do exist (there are 60 or so specialist ships in the world). Making sure there's one always around in our part of the world would be a good step. Usually, it seems there are ships in our region, which is reassuring.

What does all this mean? I always argue for more planning against the unexpected events. This survey shows that we are moderately well prepared for disruption in drug supply, and that we have growing resilience (and probably growing repair capacity) in keeping access to data and the internet. But diesel (and fuel generally) is less well organised, less prepared and arguably more disruptive. It's clear there are limits to what markets can (or want) to do to maintain supply at reasonable prices. The Government is acting. It seems late, and tentative.

Time to get a grip. That's the message we all need to send.

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

Neville Marr

Chartered Accountant

An accountant who understands  
your business!

I'm a Blenheim-based chartered accountant, hobbyist beekeeper, and business partner with all of my clients. What's important to me is understanding my clients' business and bringing that personal touch. Please contact me confidentially and without obligation if you'd like to discuss how I can assist you and your business this year.

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS  
AUSTRALIA • NEW ZEALAND

xero CERTIFIED  
ADVISOR

myob

www.marrnz.com  
Office: 03 929 3100  
Mobile: 027 276 7682  
Email: office@marrnz.com

# FOR SALE

- 540 FD boxes with plastic frames
- 350 FD boxes complete with plastic frames, base, top feeder & lid
- 300 3/4 boxes
- 120 FD double nuc boxes, with top feeders
- 40 FD black plastic frame feeders



Ph. 027 272 6764

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

Apiarist's Advocate Ltd.

NZBN: 9429051156954

ISSN: 3021-4742

[www.apiaristsadvocate.com](http://www.apiaristsadvocate.com)

[www.facebook.com/apiadvocate](https://www.facebook.com/apiadvocate)

[www.instagram.com/apiarists\\_advocate](https://www.instagram.com/apiarists_advocate)

## Editorial

**Editor:** Patrick Dawkins

To make comment or send press releases please email [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz) or phone **Patrick, 027 383 7278**.

## Creative

**Design:** Ashleigh Ryan

## Advertising

For more information or to make a booking, email [advertising@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:advertising@apiadvocate.co.nz) or phone **Patrick 027 383 7278** or **Laura 021 130 7446**.

Booking deadline is the second to last Friday of the month prior to publication and artwork must be supplied by the final Friday of the month.

# Take your place in these pages

[advertising@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:advertising@apiadvocate.co.nz)

Patrick 027 383 7278

Laura 021 130 7446



Never miss an issue!

Subscribe at



[www.apiaristsadvocate.com](http://www.apiaristsadvocate.com)

# Don't miss the latest industry news



## SAVE



Save *Apiarist's Advocate* to your mobile device for ease of access anytime! Just choose the download  option from the bottom menu, then the Save to Home Screen  option from the next menu.

## PRINT



Print *Apiarist's Advocate* anywhere! Our layout is designed to fit A4 paper, so whether you're at home or work, simply hit print for your hard-copy.