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# APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions – for Beekeepers – by Beekeepers



## “Manuka Honey” War of the Words

New Zealand's Trademark Bid Denied in the UK



# Manuka Trust's Plan of Attack



BY PATRICK DAWKINS

A December ruling from the UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) against New Zealand interests to trademark the term “manuka honey” was analogous to the loss of a battle, but not the war, say those leading Aotearoa’s fight. Despite only six months in the role of executive director of Te Pitau Ltd, which acts as the operating arm of the Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT), Kristen Kohere-Soutar explains to editor Patrick Dawkins that their work is aimed longer term than just the UK decision and that the next six months will be focused on setting up infrastructure to survive a long-running “war”.

**The UK IPO’s rejection of New Zealand’s certification trademark attempt into the third largest market for Kiwi honey exporters stings for the MCT and Te Pitau, whereas the Australian Manuka Honey Association – which led the opposition – are delighted with the ruling which means they can still brand their honey as “manuka”.**

Paul Callander, chairman of the Australian Association, has called the decision “right” and “fair” while MCT Chair Pita Tipene has reaffirmed the Trust’s position that it is anything but.

“This is an indigenous rights issue and is out of step with existing indigenous IP frameworks,” Tipene says.

“Manuka is our Māori reo (language) and a precious taonga (treasure) that we must honour and protect. This ruling ignores the role of iwi as kaitiaki (guardians) and is insulting to Māori and our culture.”

Adding salt into that wound was the ruling also awarded costs to the victorious Australia producers, although Kohere-Soutar

says the yet to be confirmed amount will “not be significant in the scheme of things”.

The fight won’t stop here though and a ruling for a similar case in front of New Zealand’s IPO, which again pits the New Zealand and Australian groups against each other, is expected to be announced at some point this year. Then there are other key markets for manuka honey where MCT has commenced action to pursue certification trademarks, such as the United States and China.

If the right to secure exclusive use of the words “manuka honey” for Kiwi producers is a war and not just a battle, what are the tactics that will guide MCT’s advance?

## CARING COLLABORATION

Regardless of what way the ruling out of the UK went, the first half of 2022 was always going to shape as a key period for Te Pitau in solidifying their operational work for the MCT in New Zealand. Since replacing Victor Goldsmith as executive director in July, Kohere-Soutar says her focus has been shared between implementing their legal strategy, improving Te Pitau’s operating procedures and also the not-so-small task of bringing together government, industry and iwi interests.

“We are leading a collaboration between all people who care and have concern for manuka,” Kohere-Soutar says.

For beekeepers their concern for manuka will obviously centre around the high-value honey the native plant is critical to producing. However, while the protection of the term “manuka honey” is crucial to Te Pitau’s work, there is also a larger role they play in protecting Māori language and taonga. For these reasons, Māori governance of MCT and Te Pitau is seen as essential to success.

## INCLUSIVE IDEALS

“It is the responsibility of the Trust to ensure the protection and preservation of manuka as a taonga and that it remains unique and authentic to us. Us being New Zealanders,” says Kohere-Soutar, who resides in Gisborne and whakapapas back to local iwi Ngati Porou, as well as several South Island hapu.



*Kirsten Kohere-Soutar, chief executive of Te Pitau Ltd., the operating arm of Mānuka Charitable Trust.*



"The Trust's beneficiaries are all New Zealanders, not just Māori. The governance is with Māori though because the Māori ontological world view holds the right values and intent to carry out this mission on behalf of all of us. That is not to say others, who do not whakapapa Māori, cannot align to it and be a part of it. It is just being led by a Māori culture that can define what that looks like and put up frameworks for our direction.

"It is not exclusive, it is inclusive," she explains.

Kohere-Soutar also reinforces the point made by Tipene, as MCT chair when the UK decision was handed down, that this is about controlling the appropriation of an indigenous language.

"Decades of activism that have sought to ensure the culture that goes with the word is preserved. The interest of iwi and Māori entities are that manuka should not be misused, misrepresented or misappropriated and is a responsibility within Māori culture to ensure this. The governance in place here is specifically referred to as "guardians" of the term manuka honey and the taonga species," Kohere-Soutar says.

### INDUSTRY, IWI AND COMMUNICATION

Engaging and working alongside iwi is going to be critical for MCT and Te Pitau as they seek to represent the Māori interest. That process began with a series of 10 hui last year, held from Kaitia to Christchurch, which the executive director says were "well received and productive".

"It's always going to be about listening to each other's point of view and understanding where everybody's coming from. I think

the engagement hui were helpful to get started on that process. It is not the be all and end all of consultation and engagement though."

On that note, going into 2022 improving communications with both iwi and the apiculture industry is a major focus of Te Pitau, alongside the ongoing legal programme and science and research work into manuka honey to underpin trademark claims.

The establishment of two sub committees, one legal to oversee the day-to-day decision making, and the other an "industry advisory group" will be crucial to implementing Te Pitau's plans going forward.

"That industry group has a direct line to the executive chair and the board and is intended to be a representative group of industry members. That forum would be the primary initiative to be able to share key communications, messages and information across the industry. It aims to build appreciation and engagement between the Trust and industry"

Appointees to the industry advisory group will likely come on the recommendation of current industry partners to MCT and Te Pitau, namely Apiculture New Zealand, Manuka Honey Appellation Society the UMF Honey Association and corporate honey companies Mānuka Health, Comvita, Oha Honey and Manuka Doctor.

Closer ties to industry, as well as wider stakeholders, will also be a goal of a fresh communications strategy which will look to incorporate greater digital communication with stakeholders, through a website and social media. Currently the Trust's website,

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[www.mct.nz](http://www.mct.nz), consists of one page which is "under construction".

"We would like everybody to be able to go onto the website and read about the mahi of the Charitable Trust and to get an update on the legal proceedings and how we're tracking," Kohere-Soutar explains.

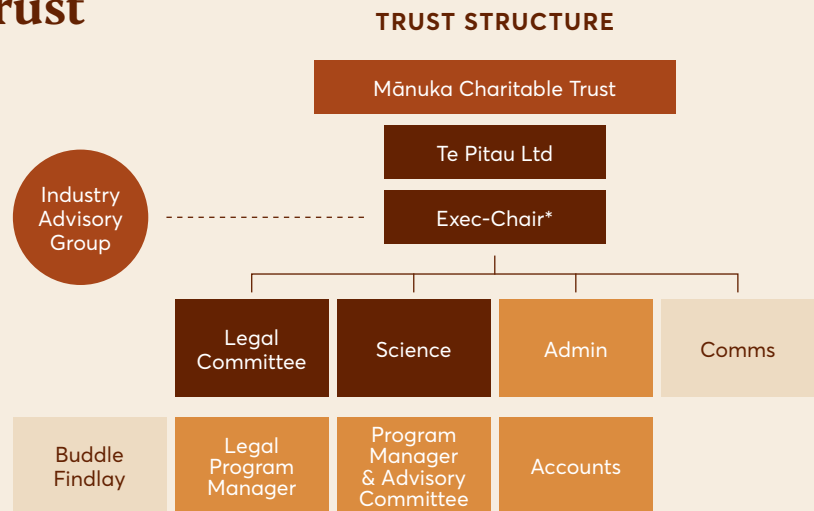
## SCIENTIFIC STRATEGY

So, while beekeepers can expect to hear more out of MCT and Te Pitau regarding their ongoing toil on behalf of the manuka honey industry, it is battle wins New Zealanders really want to learn of, not setbacks like the UK IPO ruling.

## The structure of Mānuka Charitable Trust and Te Pitau Ltd.

### PURPOSE OF THE TRUST

- Established 2020 as the guardians of the taonga Mānuka
- Obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Recognises that IP would be held by Māori as Kaitiaki
- Trustees representative of Iwi Māori across Aotearoa
- Operational arm is Te Pitau Ltd – with its own board
- Independent Advisory Board



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To that end, Te Pitau is overseeing a science programme into manuka honey. This work is being carried out in conjunction with Ministry for Primary Industries' ongoing manuka honey research and is funded through a \$4 million grant from Government announced in 2019. Kohere-Soutar says that fund is so large because of the need to deepen the science of manuka honey generally, but they also hope it can provide an effective weapon in their arsenal.

"The science programs specifically focus on what science is needed to authenticate and define manuka honey, and then enable us to articulate that in various intellectual property offices around the world with our certification trademark strategy," she says.

#### CALLING ON CONTRIBUTIONS

Up until this point MCT and Te Pitau's work on their various fronts has been funded by a mix of Government grants and loans, plus industry support. August saw Te Pitau call a gathering of 24 honey companies to explain their position and they have received ongoing financial support from the honey industry through some of those companies.

"We are mindful of not putting our hands into the pockets of our smaller beekeeper outfits though," Kohere-Soutar says.

"The natural question has been, 'what can the larger companies do first?'. We would certainly be open to anyone who wants to contribute though and would be pleased to receive funding from anyone, no matter how large or small.

"Once we get our communications more organised, our website up, then we will be able to reach out in a more orderly fashion. I

don't want to reach out too far now, when we are still trying to get communications up and running because I want to be consistent with what we are saying and have a system to engage their perspective, given the myriad of people who are interested."

#### SAME BOAT, SAME DIRECTION

While the legal stoushes ahead loom large, both in New Zealand with the IPO case finding due in 2022 and in other strategic markets of the world – which may include a fresh approach in the UK – so too does massaging the myriad of interests in New Zealand.

It may not prove easy to please all the stakeholders all the time, but Te Pitau's executive chair is confident they will be doing a better job of working alongside the beekeeping industry and communicating their strategies going forward. Add to that working with the interests of Māori across the country, as they seek to protect the reo and taonga, as well as their dealings with Government and you can see why MCT and Te Pitau have their sights set on the big picture of defeating overseas producers and packers who see manuka honey as their own, and not just the one-off stoushes.

"We've got to take the long game, because it's a unique model that we're trying to achieve for the country. We are new and have a blend of interests, it's always going to be about listening to each other's point of view and understanding where everybody's coming from," Kohere-Soutar says, before calling on one of the guiding principles of the MCT. "It is about trying to get in the same boat going in the same direction. We can't do that with disunity, we can only do it with unity." 🐝

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# The UK IPO Manuka Decision



BY IAN FLETCHER

Former chief executive of the UK Patent Office and free trade negotiator with the European Commission, Ian Fletcher – who also served as an advisor to Mānuka Honey Appellation Society and Te Pitau until early last year – gives his analysis on the recent United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office (UK IPO) manuka honey ruling and where to from here following the setback.

**A lot of people are wondering what to make of the UK IPO's decision to allow the appeals by the Australian manuka producers and Valeo-Rowse (the largest player in the UK domestic honey market). The decision kills efforts by New Zealand based producers to get a certification trademark for manuka honey in the UK, unless there is a successful appeal.**

What should we think, and what should we do?

The decision runs to 50 pages. It's carefully considered and needs to be taken seriously. It is made under UK law and so reflects UK law and trademark practice. New Zealand law is not relevant.

The New Zealand case, made through the Manuka Honey Appellation Society, failed to show that the term 'manuka honey' had acquired what's known as 'distinctiveness', which would have meant the Tribunal considered that consumers would generally associate the term with manuka honey only from New Zealand.

Without distinctiveness, the decision means that 'manuka honey' can be used to describe honey made mainly from manuka nectar from anywhere. This will help Australian producers immediately, but also others in other countries later, as manuka is being planted in several parts of the world (for example, Serbia has produced an excellent 'how to' guide for would-be manuka growers).

The New Zealand case wasn't helped by the MPI definition, nor by some exporters using 'manuka' in corporate trademarks used to sell non-manuka honey. But the big loss was on distinctiveness.

Overall, this is not a surprise: trademark law and rules set the bar high, so descriptive terms aren't locked up and so are generally available to all producers. We should have been prepared.

The Tribunal also made a finding of bad faith against the New Zealand side.

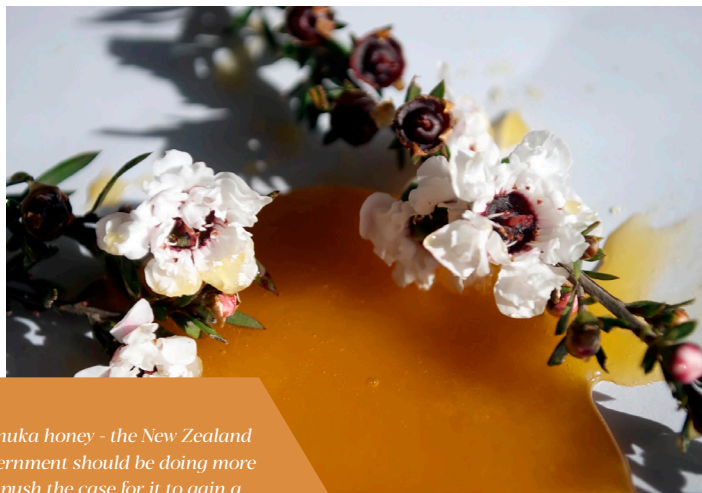
What next? An appeal may be considered. Whatever the merits of an appeal, it's time to get serious. The whole industry should come together, and

- Go back to Government on Geographic Indications (GIs). The Government's refusal to engage on GIs is a blunder, made worse by the Australian submarine case, which will delay and toughen EU free trade agreements; and
- Talk to the Australians. Do a deal. We will lose something, but right now we stand to lose the lot, ten-plus years work and value. The perfect solution: a joint GI with Australia (or some states). It would give a lot more negotiating weight. 🐝

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

We'd love to hear it.

Email your  
'letter to the editor' to  
[editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz)



*Manuka honey - the New Zealand Government should be doing more to push the case for it to gain a Geographical Indicator, such as Champagne has, says Ian Fletcher.*





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Many beekeepers will be into honey harvest as this January issue rolls out, but I hope you can find a quiet time to take a read. This month I thought I'd preview a few highlights...

**The UK IPO ruling:** While the decision to deny Kiwi honey producers a certification trademark on the term "manuka honey" is a big setback, the Manuka Charitable Trust are claiming to have their eyes on the bigger picture in *Manuka Trust's Plan of Attack*, pg 2. Then, the eminently qualified Ian Fletcher sets out his thoughts on pg 6, proposing a change of tack and even serious consideration of a deal with Australia before it is too late.

Given his extensive experience in UK and EU trade negotiation and patent law, plus his work (until recently) advising those leading New Zealand's bid to secure exclusive use of the term manuka honey, his belief that we should now be giving serious consideration to working alongside Australian produces is an eye-opener.

Of course, Ian's *Views From Outside the Apiary* are a monthly feature in our pages and something readers regularly bring up to me as a point of interest. They are often purposefully off-topic of beekeeping, but always thoroughly thought through and researched. If you want to get thinking critically, I recommend looking his columns up: [www.apiaristsadvocate.com/blog/categories/views-from-outside-the-apiary](http://www.apiaristsadvocate.com/blog/categories/views-from-outside-the-apiary)

**Strong Headwinds for Canterbury Beekeepers:** Regular contributor Maggie James and I thought long and hard about the nature of this story on page 12, as her subjects Rod and Jo Dreaver could be seen as coming off as overly negative as they address some major concerns facing beekeepers. The beekeepers of 33 years' experience have eloquently delved into some serious issues impacting their small commercial beekeeping business and I commend them for doing so. I think many beekeepers will read and relate to aspects that Rod and Jo touch on. Whether the topics we broach are positive or negative, they are the reality, and that is what we deal in.

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**Give as your feedback:** There is obviously plenty more stories besides all that so please read the lot and give us your feedback ... are you facing similar concerns to the Dreavers? What is your solution? What approach should the Manuka Charitable Trust now take? Whatever you want to chip in on, email [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz)

Happy New Year!

-Patrick Dawkins, editor. 

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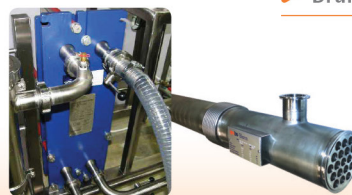


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# Covid and Costs Predicted to Persist in '22



From Covid forced lockdowns, freight delays, fast rising costs and heavy hive losses, 2021 was a year that threw up obstacles for beekeepers, honey packers and those businesses which provide supplies and services. It's not all bad news though as we check in with some major industry stakeholders to get their thoughts on operating in 2021 and hopes for improved businesses conditions on the horizon in 2022.

**Despite beekeepers remaining essential workers in the eyes of New Zealand's Covid response, the long-reaching tentacles of the global pandemic were always going to have an impact on apicultural business operations in 2021 and that looks set to roll over into 2022.**

While individual businesses were inconvenienced by Covid impediments such as regional border restrictions and vaccine mandates, on the whole beekeepers were able to work through as rules and restrictions became more worn-in and workable in the second full year of Covid lockdowns.

"All of those habits and practices have almost become business as usual," Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) chief executive Karin Kos says.

"I think Covid's going to be here for a while longer and we are going to have to deal with it for at least another year."

## **COSTS ON THE RISE**

While it might be business as usual for many beekeepers, suppliers to the industry have been caught up in lockdowns and freight delays.

Plastic packaging specialists Pharmapac, who supply many honey packers, have had a very trying year operating out of lockdown-hit Auckland, general manager Brett Hopwood says. Another service provider to honey houses, HD Process NZ, while still able to operate as an essential business maintaining and installing equipment in sheds around the country, is feeling the constraint of freight delays through some key ports slowing

importation of gear. Add to that beekeeping supply company New Zealand Beeswax, whose general manager Nick Taylor says suppliers are feeling the pinch of the rising freight costs.

"2021 was the year that inflation and cost of transport started to bite. I think we were sheltered from that the previous year due to exchange rate and through existing stock levels. They have started to bite now though and there's no sign of that improving. I'm almost weekly getting a letter from a supplier saying you're going to have to move the prices," Taylor says.

While those suppliers fight headwinds to keep their businesses and their beekeeping and honey packing clients going, the issue of freight is also drastically felt by traders seeking to export honey from our shores.

"The big issue that has come through in the last three to four months is the cost of freight," Kos says.

"That's been phenomenal. It's quadrupled over the last few months and just trying to get access to freight, with the cost, the delays. So even though we've got the product ready to go, it's been quite difficult."

It's a problem exporters are going to face for the foreseeable future too, the ApiNZ chief executive predicts.

"We've talked to Government and I've talked to the other primary sector groups. It's pretty much out of our control. It's such a global issue. It's not just us obviously. So, there's not too much we can do about it. But that worries us and our members."

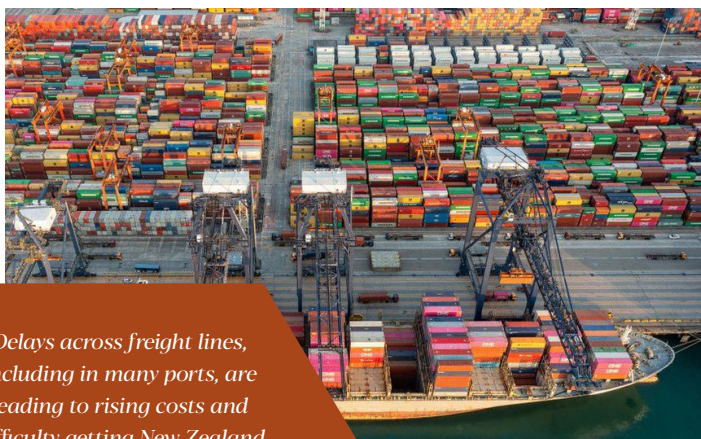
## **HONEY SALES**

While traders might have trouble freighting honey internationally the majority of demand for honey is very much variety dependent as the calendar rolls over to 2022.

While many around the industry reported difficulty selling manuka honey in 2021, despite a reduced production year, other varieties which were previously slow to sell have found markets. South Island producers have seen their clover honey climb in demand, while honey dew from areas of the native beech tree was also snapped up by buyers in 2021.

"I've never seen the list of such good signals going into a season as what I'm seeing this year," says Taylor, who is in regular discourse with beekeepers through NZ Beeswax.

Positive signs include below-par honey yields in competing production areas such as Canada and South America, as well as soon-to-be free trade with the United Kingdom. And, while honey buyers could pick and choose what honey to buy in recent-past



*Delays across freight lines, including in many ports, are leading to rising costs and difficulty getting New Zealand honey to international markets.*

seasons, things appear to be changing as some packers are now seeking supply agreements with beekeepers.

"Three years ago, you couldn't give a honey jar away. Now, there are two people biting your hand off to get it. Almost all clover is good clover, and even white honey that can be blended with good clover is good clover. Bush honey is popular again too," Taylor says.

In the North Island the signs are not as positive though and New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated (NZBI) president Jane Lorimer, herself a Waikato beekeeper, says while non-manuka honey might be more readily sought after, the prices are still depressed.

"We're still sitting on majority of our product. I do hear that prices are moving up a bit. I think it's mostly in the South Island though. I haven't heard anybody say the price has shifted a lot, but some have been forced to sell at a lower price," Lorimer says.

It is all tempered by one big negative. Some beekeepers are having trouble selling manuka honey, as demand from packers and the international market fell back in 2021 following a spike in sales the previous year.

Some beekeepers who have been able to sell manuka honey are facing delayed payments, Taylor says he has heard.

"Even people that are selling have been drip fed payment, or the payment has been delayed because of shipping concerns or container availability, or just slow payment from the end user, which is resulting in the beekeeper getting paid slowly," Taylor says.

#### IN THE HIVES AND INTO 2022

At an apiary level, 2021 proved a troubling season on two major fronts. Firstly, the national honey take was down, going from 27,000 tonnes in 2020 to 20,500 in 2021, according to Ministry for Primary Industries data. Also in 2021 many beekeepers in the Bay of Plenty and Waikato were hard hit by hive losses in autumn, winter and spring. The main factor was suspected to be varroa mite and related viruses, potentially transferred between hives in kiwifruit pollination.

Early indications are the 2022 manuka honey take could also drop below average, while it remains to be seen as to what effect the mass migration of hives into kiwifruit pollination this past spring will have on hive health and whether problems will again manifest at the end of the honey flow.

Despite those challenges looming, Kos says the honey industry still has some key things to be thankful for in these Covid times, especially as other primary industries grapple with labour shortages and freight frustrations along with perishable crops.

"We have a product that people really, really want, it can sit in port and it doesn't go off," Kos says.

"We can also still operate in lockdowns and beekeepers are still going out the gate. I think it's pretty good." 🐝

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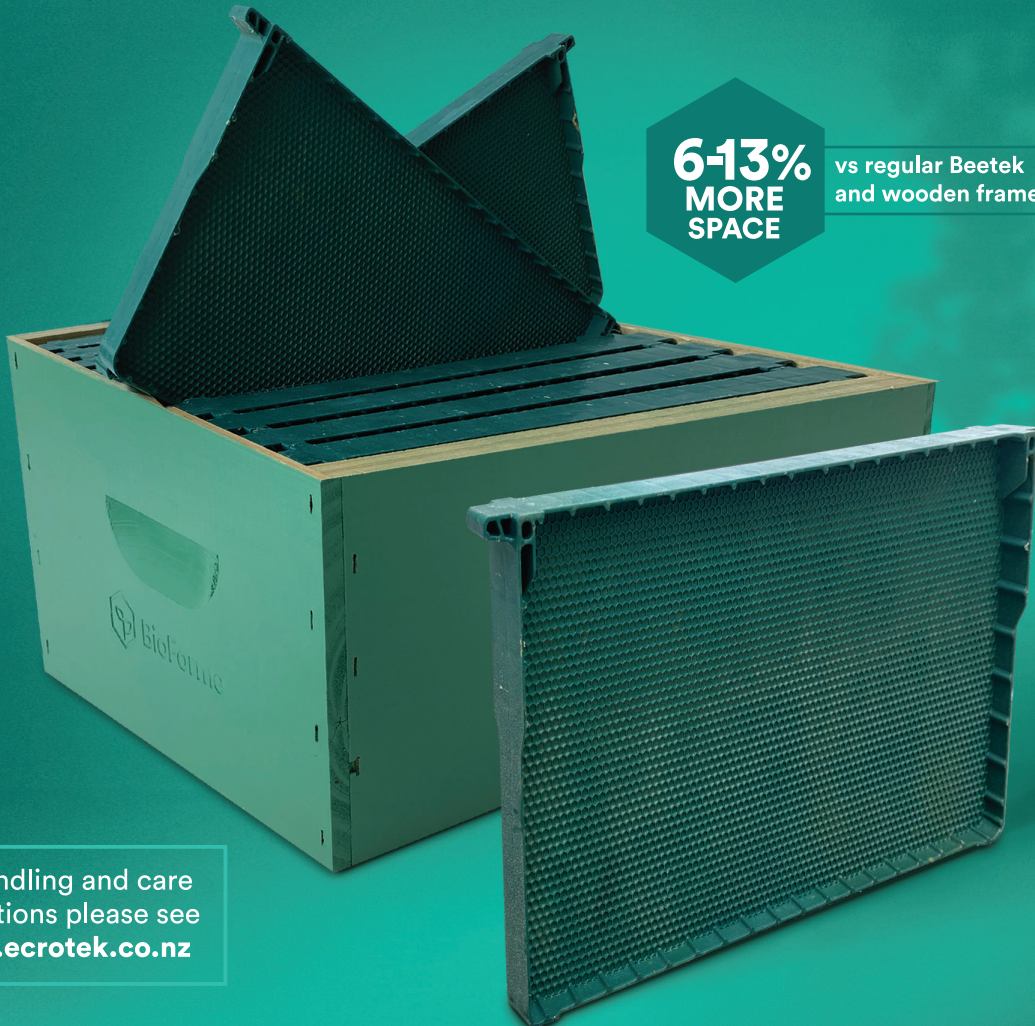
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# Strong Headwinds for Canterbury Beekeepers



BY MAGGIE JAMES

Many beekeeping businesses are facing tough times, most notably due to low honey prices in recent years. The troubles for some neither begin or end there though, and so Maggie James caught up with fellow Selwyn, Canterbury, beekeepers Rod and Jo Dreaver of Bee My Honey to get their thoughts on some major issues facing apiarists in their area: pollination competition, overstocking of beehives, inadequately experienced beekeepers, varroa bombs, disease outbreaks, lack of loyalty and increased costs in production and bureaucracy.

**At 19 years of age, Rod Dreaver started with two hives in his parents' backyard and has now worked as a commercial beekeeper for over 33 years, including 18 months with Airborne Honey, several seasons in Canada and USA, and 11 years with Hantz Honey. In 2002 Rod and wife Jo, purchased 350 hives and a year later another 450 hives, whilst Rod continued to work part time at Hantz Honey. Since 2004 Bee My Honey has been a fulltime business for the couple, along with three now teenage children, based in Lincoln.**



*Rod and Jo Dreaver of Bee My Honey. The Canterbury beekeepers of 33 years' experience say small beekeeping businesses like theirs are facing ever-increasing challenges to survival.*

The quality of the business's produce has been recognised, winning the Special Reserve Honey category at the Apiculture NZ National Honey Competition in 2017, along with placings in honey dew and creamed clover categories. Then in 2018 and 2019 Rod and Jo finally managed to build their own RMP processing plant and family dwelling, both on the same site at Lincoln.

Bee My Honey undertake some contract honey extraction, produce bulk honey as well as package their own clover, beech dew, manuka, kanuka, brassicas, and lavender honey for retail sale on site, online and some retail outlets.

On top of those honeys, Bee My Honey also provide pollination services to a range of crops in their local area, generally radish, carrot, blackcurrant, canola, kale, white clover and – up until a few weeks ago – lavender. And that is what this story was initially going to be about – moving hives in and out of the lavender fields like the Dreaivers have been doing for the last 15 years, but instead they have a tale of caution that is emblematic of numerous wider issues facing beekeepers.

## POLLINATION BATTLES

Rod arrived at the lavender field a couple of days prior to hive delivery to find approximately 60 full depth double brood-box hives supered up for the flow, belonging to an Ashburton beekeeper who up until now has not had hives north of the Rakaia River, as far as Dreaver is aware.

"The farmer reckoned he told me, but there was definitely no notification by phone or email of not needing my services and this was a most frustrating way to find that there was no pollination.

"I tried all weekend to renegotiate with the guy, but he was adamant that my bees were producing honey that was rightly his. He just could not understand that I acknowledged it was his land, but he needs my bees to get pollination – it's a two-way situation! He wasn't interested in loyalty, negotiation, or lack of notification. I also rang his new beekeeper.

"I had spent three months tickling 50 hives along to an acceptable standard for this contract, and next thing I know, I now have to work out where I am going to put an extra 50 hives in a location that they will pay for themselves. The lack of communication and being booted out is exasperating."



The issue is not limited to that one instance though, with increased competition for pollination contracts causing friction between beekeepers and growers across Canterbury's renown seed growing plains.

"So far this season, this is the second incident of ousting or attempted underbidding. I am one of two local beekeeping outfits placing hives on the same property for blackcurrant pollination. This involves hundreds of hives, and we found ourselves being told by the farmer that another competitor could undercut us by \$10 less per hive. Luckily, me and my colleague were able to negotiate, retaining last season's pollination price," Dreaver says.

"Up until now, in Ellesmere, we haven't had to deal with these underhand dealings. If I am offered a farm site in this area, I talk with the farmer and if I think there is a beekeeper involved, I phone that beekeeper. Fortunately, most of the farmers around here are loyal and are happy with my services, but I have twice had instances where the farmer has rung with a beekeeper on the doorstep who wants to undercut me!"

Dreaver says the price beekeepers are willing to charge for their pollination services was inevitably going to reduce "once the honey bubble burst".

"There are now too many beekeepers chasing the contracts. There doesn't seem to be a lot of loyalty in business these days and I really feel for good established beekeepers who are principally pollinators and have chosen to pollinate rather than chase the manuka dollars. They will be the ones suffering the drop in prices the most. Every man and his dog is chasing pollination

and a lot of them are willing to do it for cheap, just to get a bit of a cashflow, and that automatically drops the prices and the living standards for everyone.

"Generally, competition in an industry is healthy, but the problem now is that there is so much undercutting and overstocking, that no one is making a dollar," Dreaver says.

### PRODUCTION COSTS

The large population of hives in the Selwyn area is coupled with reduced forage as increasing areas of land has been converted to dairy farming and wind pollinated cereal and grain crops over the past 20 years, while beekeeping costs are on the rise too.

"Around here, up until recently it was recognised that it took \$4.50 to produce 1kg of honey, but post Covid we have increases in fuel costs, sugar, inflation and hive treatments, which are having to be more frequent. Therefore, I reckon that the honey prices now need to be a minimum of \$7/kg to cover costs.

"Then there is the number of beehives that I have had to burn in recent, due to others not knowing how to prevent, recognise and control AFB," Dreaver says.

That is another major issue that beekeepers in the Selwyn area of the Canterbury Plain are facing Dreaver says – a high incidence of AFB, worsened by not just the high population of beehives but a lack of experience among those working them.

Where once Kiwi beekeepers gained experience through working for or with a variety of experienced commercial beekeepers, as well as embarking on northern hemisphere



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beekeeping experiences in the New Zealand offseason, more recent times have seen greater amounts of unexperienced people jump straight in to keeping hives.

"We now appear to have an industry with many inexperienced commercial beekeepers and the same with many new hobbyists. There is also the occasional farmer who wants to save pollination fees, and this has ended up with them having to burn their AFB hives. Until we have a big correction downwards in the number of hives and 'beekeepers' it's going to stay the same and a lot of us will struggle to stay afloat.

"The last few years, many beekeepers bought hives at the top of the market, and almost every season since has been a hard one. Many carry far too much debt, and to survive they are getting rather underhand. Many of these new beekeepers have never worked in another outfit, or perhaps just very briefly, and they have no idea how to manage hives in a commercial operation. Neglected bees are going to cause major problems."

### BIG DECISIONS

Even if hives are not neglected, some of the decision making coming from larger beekeeping operations around the amount of hives placed in the area also troubles Dreaver.

"A hands-on sole operator is aware of everything they do to their hives, and what the production is. They are not going to bother with sites that are constantly non-productive. Whereas a larger operation is not looking at profitability of sole sites, just as long as the company makes a profit somewhere along the line. They make

their money with the numbers of hives they are holding, and when you get hives that aren't being operated to full capacity, the company is cutting their nose off to spite their face, along with making life uncomfortable for everyone else."

The discomfort could leave Bee My Honey in "dire straits" if it is a bad honey season, and Dreaver says they have survived through the past year due to one round of the government Wage Subsidy and Working for Families payments. This year's lockdown they were not eligible for the Wage Subsidy, but were able to do honey deliveries, which "saved their bacon".

As part of their cost cutting, the Dreavers no longer belong to any industry organisation, and no longer attend conferences in the North Island. They look forward to next year's conference in Christchurch though.

Despite many commercial beekeepers struggling for survival, Dreaver still believes there is a perception in New Zealand that beekeeping is easy money.

"The public do not understand how hard beekeepers work. Many think that honey is produced all year round, not just six to eight weeks of the year. TV documentaries often featuring beekeeping operations show clean and tidy looking beekeepers in new overalls, clean trucks in fabulous weather and making the work look like it's a breeze. It's now real hard graft dealing with varroa bombs, constant AFB in the area, and competition for winter sites.

"Once upon a time beekeeping was an enjoyable and profitable occupation, but it's ceasing to be either," Dreaver laments.

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### EXPENSES AND THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

The rising cost of doing business and the aforementioned price for honey being below cost of production are increasingly taking their toll on beekeeping businesses such as his, Dreaver believes.

"The only thing that seems to be rising in this industry is bureaucratic fees, and the people to whom we pay these make a good living paid for by our fees, while we live on less than the minimum wage.

"The industry is in bad shape, and an industry needs the faith of the people working in the industry. Whilst many of us are independents, people in the group should be looking after each other and this is not happening."

While greater respect between beekeeping business owners around hive placements and pollination contracts would be a start, ultimately the price of honey needs to increase to cover mounting cost of production the Canterbury beekeepers believe.

Jo Dreaver noted that most supermarkets they have previously supplied were totally ruthless in their dealings, so the couple have removed their honey off the shelves from all but one of these outlets. Instead, much of their trade is online or onsite at their shop, where most customers are in the 50-plus age bracket.

"To us it is a major concern that a lot of the younger generation don't like honey and it has a bad rap associated with sugar. To entice a younger generation there needs to be an industry drive on all the benefits of honey in comparison to cane and corn sugars. A campaign needs to be started to attract the next generation to consume and use honey," Jo says.

Rod Dreaver in Bee My Honey's three-year-old extraction plant in Lincoln, Canterbury. A facility that comes with ever increasing compliance costs.



"We have many Indian and Chinese customers, and it never ceases to absolutely amaze them that our honey is unadulterated without additives or antibiotics."

The Dreavers would like to see new research, or consideration of overseas research, on the medical properties of ingested honey in gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular issues, oral health, constipation, sleep issues, diarrhoea, and cancers to help promote the product.

So, while Bee My Honey continues to produce quality honey and strong healthy colonies for pollination contracts, there is risk of the business – and others like it – falling over should current operating conditions persist. From an increasingly competitive pollination market, to hive over stocking leading to greater varroa and AFB threats, plus the rising cost of production and low returns for honey, there are gale-force headwinds in the Selwyn district.

The Dreavers are experienced, knowledgeable, hardworking, and enthusiastic in all aspects of their business, but is that enough to make it all work? 🐝

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# A Different Kind of Apiculture



BY CHRIS NORTHCOTT

Every year, millions of bumble bee nests are raised and sold to commercial buyers globally. These will last a mere matter of months before the colonies disintegrate and disperse. Chris Northcott spoke to Mike Sim, business development manager at Biobees, about why bumble bee nests are in such demand.

**The beloved bumble bee is a bit of a mystery to many (honey-) beekeepers. While they have similarities to the more familiar honey bee, bumble bees are also strikingly different to what honey-beekeepers know and love. As a start, they don't produce honey in any volume that makes harvesting it worthwhile. Second, their colonies do not overwinter, meaning continued bumble bee-keeping requires new colonies to be started from scratch. So, why do people do it?**

The answer lies in horticulture – especially greenhouse horticulture. Bumble bees make excellent pollinators and are particularly in

demand for avocados, kiwifruit, tomatoes, eggplants, capsicum, stone fruits, and many berry crops.

While honey bees are regularly used for crop pollination, bumble bees have a number of distinct advantages – aside from the advantages that come from their larger size and hairier bodies. For a start, some crops, such as tomatoes, require a “buzz technique” to shake the pollen out of the long pollen tubes – a method the honey bee is unable to perform. Furthermore, bumble bees can fly in a wider range of environmental factors (rain, lower light and temperature) than honey bees, allowing them to get more pollination done on the shorter, cooler, and wetter days of



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*Biobees bumble bee hives are used – in conjunction with honey bee hives – to help pollinate many orchards across New Zealand, including kiwifruit.*



spring and early summer. As such, relying on bumble bees is a bit like having "an insurance policy on the weather", Sim explains.

The high demand for honey production can make it hard for pollination services to be acquired from honey-keepers, while no such difficulty exists for bumble bees. Additionally, the relocating of beehives for pollination has made kiwifruit growers nervous about the potential for beehives to spread the PSA disease.

The use of greenhouses also favours bumble bees as honey bees don't cope well in them. In addition to that, because bumble bee colonies can be started and grown any time of the year (unlike honey bees), they are available for pollination service right through the winter, when greenhouse crops are worth the most on the market. Studies are also indicating that bumble bees are far more efficient pollinators than honey bees, and that in many cases the two types of bees in fact compete with each other – resulting in higher pollination from each when both are present.

All in all, industrial scale horticulture means high levels of pollination are required and as Sim puts it, "intensive cropping needs intensive pollination for high yields".

This is where Biobees steps in. Biobees is New Zealand's largest supplier of bumble bees and specialises in the *bombus terrestris* species – the buff tailed bumble bee. The business began in the mid-1990s following the emergence of commercial bumble bee rearing overseas in the late-'80s.

The centre of operations is in the Hawke's Bay, while Sim works out of Pukekohe on sales, product improvement, and technical support for customers. Coming from a conservation background and equipped with an entomology (the study of insects) degree from the University of Auckland, his role sees him on the road to support growers and advise on the best use of the hives for their operation. Part of his role also sees him "going up driveways" of horticulture businesses, looking to generate sales. Many growers are not aware that bumble bee hives can be purchased commercially.

The production of colonies is all done from Hastings. Between 10-15 staff work throughout the year nurturing new queens to build up tens of thousands of strong colonies ready for sale when required. These colonies are couriered quickly around the country on demand and are provided within a ready-to-go disposable hive box making for easy deployment by buyers.

The ventilated boxes contain a queen bumble bee together with her colony and brood (size dependent on development and price), sheep's wool for internal insulation, a syrup feed solution in a bladder in the base, and a small pollen patty. All the work is done in an indoor environment, removing some challenges (like the weather) while adding others (natural environment must be recreated artificially).

Staff are trained on the job and must not be shy of bumble bees, Sim says.

"Bumble bees will buzz your face – they know where the important parts are and how to intimidate, although they are more docile than honey bees."

The hardware they use has been upgraded over the years, reducing the direct contact between workers and bumble bees and making stings a rarer occurrence.

It may come as a surprise that the bumble bee industry is reliant on the honey bee industry. The continual and swift production of pollination strength colonies requires a substantial and continuous supply of pollen – which is provided by honey-keepers.

Biobees is keen to engage with people who are interested in supplying pollen, as this is sometimes a challenge for them when beekeepers focus exclusively on honey production, when weather limits supply (such as in the South Island this spring), or when other demand for pollen makes it difficult to acquire a sufficient supply.

Not all buyers of Biobees' hives are commercial growers. Many want only a single hive for their home garden or simply for the pleasure of having bumble bees and to that Sim can relate.

"Almost everyone has a bit of a warm fuzzy feeling about bumble bees," the entomologist says,

adding, "they are a sign of spring and the break of winter, and being a more visual insect it is heartening to see them buzzing on flowers, knowing that summer is on the way." 🐝



*Mike Sim (right),  
Biobees business  
development manager.*



*A bumble bee  
pollinates a  
blueberry flower.*





# Honey Sales – Observations from the Side-lines



**BY DARREN BAINBRIDGE**  
– MyApiary founder and general manager

When I first started learning about the honey industry about nine years ago, I was a complete “new-bee”. Coming to the industry with fresh eyes I questioned everything and made a lot of observations on different business practices.

With time I have seen how these different practices/decisions have played out for a number of businesses.

Reflecting on some of these observations I made in the early days, one thing that stands out to me is the belief that “honey has always been difficult to sell”, with some years a lot harder than others. Observing that this is a significant business risk, I remember in my early days in the industry asking quite often, “why don’t you have a supply contract with a packer or number of packers?” Some businesses did, but, most did not, (I know in current times some of these contracts have not been honoured, but I want to pick up on a theme here). The common answer I got was “I don’t trust them, if I have a contract, I won’t get the best price for my honey”, with the majority of producers constantly shopping around.

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As times passed from the good – of being able to shop around for top dollar – to the current largely price-taking environment, what's happened? While most are struggling with their cashflow and sheds full of honey, a number of businesses are doing extremely well. Some are even expanding and taking the opportunity to buy businesses/hives at discounted rates from those that have distressed cashflow. I'm not just talking about the "big five" operators either.

Those doing well generally fall into one of two categories. Those that have played the long game and not been 100% focussed on price, been loyal to their buy/packer and built good relationships, are still moving their honey. While those that realised the industry was changing and have taken a step back from working in the hives to focus on developing their honey sales, have also weathered this period well.

### NEW YEAR, NEW APPROACH?

Given its a new year, a time to contemplate and set some New Year's resolutions, is it time to make some changes to your priorities within your business? With a shed full of honey and another crop about to come in, if you're the business owner is it time to have that hard honest conversation with yourself and realise, you're no longer solely a beekeeper and not just in the business of keeping bees, but in the business of producing honey?!

I know, I know, I hear it all the time "I'm just a beekeeper, it's not my job to sell my honey". But hang on, back the bus up a bit, if you're a producer of honey doesn't that therefor, by default, make you a seller of honey!? Even the government has identified this, and afforded you the freedoms to continue operating as an essential food producer under the various Covid frameworks.

You may have started your career as a beekeeper and have possibly hired others to keep bees for you, but now as a business owner and employer your focus must also change. I know the transition can be hard, I have had to do it myself. To give up some of the things that are familiar – that you really like doing and why you got into the business in the first place. However – you must develop and put your energy into a business aspect that is potentially more foreign to you and might be just what your business needs. In some ways, given time, this can be quite freeing.

Now that we have established, you're a honey producer not a beekeeper (the differentiation is quite important), how much time



*Darren Bainbridge. The MyApiary founder wonders if beekeepers could be focusing more attention on marketing, rather than just making, honey.*

do you put towards finding new opportunities to sell your honey? I'll say initially it should be at least 50%, if not more!

I still see a lot of opportunity for New Zealand honey to expand exports. According to a New Zealand Trade and Enterprise report, we only make up 1.3% of the global honey market. The world is a big place, there is still plenty of room for another packer/exporter or two ... or three. How about some regional co-ops (not a national one, this is about you taking responsibility for your destiny, not someone else)? A few like-minded honey producers like yourself working together to meet an export contract or producing a product like mead or Jun tea (honey kombucha) to increase honey use?

Opportunity abounds for honey, but you're not going to find a buyer for your honey with your head inside a hive.

**Darren Bainbridge is the founder and general manager of MyApiary, a provider of beehive, apiary and honey house management software, as well as beekeeping business advisory and consultancy. [www.myapiary.com](http://www.myapiary.com)** 🐝



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# Big BOP



BY DAVE BLACK

Maybe it's because beekeepers generally seem to have a problem with authority and structure, they are what we kindly call 'independent', that the Bay of Plenty Bee Interest Group is a little different. There is no formal structure, no chairperson, no membership fee, and no rules. It's not even a requirement that you own bees. We don't promote or represent anyone. We have around 320 of these rebels on our newsletter list. Just quietly, some of them belong to more regular beekeeping organisations too.

**Our ethos is about participation; you get what you give, nothing is done for you. Anyone with an interest in bees and their habitat, however peripheral, is welcome to a meeting. Our beekeepers lend or exchange equipment, advise and sympathise, or lend each other sites, skills, and books, even bees, mostly on a one-to-one basis. We have members young and old, adept and equipped for anything from box-making to queen rearing; microscopy to mead. Apart from modest self-improvement and out-reach, the group builds networks and support.**

One of the associations we have maintained over the years has been with the 1650ha TECT All Terrain Park, owned and operated by Western Bay of Plenty and Tauranga City Council, and financially supported by the Tauranga Energy Consumer Trust (TECT). As a centre for expansive adventure and educational opportunities the TECT permits an apiary site, and provides a modern, sustainable building we use for our winter meeting programme, equipped with modern audio-visual equipment, kitchen, and toilet facilities.

Winter meetings are topic based, while the summer programme visits member's own, mostly suburban and lifestyle, home apiaries. The last Sunday of every month will find us peering into hives of all kinds, offering – often unsolicited – advice and kept in good humour by a shared 'bring-a-plate' tea. These visits might



*Anyone with an interest in bees and their habitat, however peripheral, is welcome to meetings of the BOP Bee Interest Group.*

have someone expert in demonstrating a particular operation, undertaking a certificate of inspection perhaps, or examine something the owner is concerned about, or maybe a joint 'field day' for networking with a group like the local branch of the New Zealand Tree Crops Association.



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Tauranga and its surrounding towns are a pretty busy spot, the climate generally mild but with a decent range from the beaches into the hills above. While there's lot of forage, there are lots of hives too, with a large local beekeeping population and a significant annual seasonal import of something like 80,000 hives for four months of pollination. It can be challenging.

While the region has been relatively lucky as far as the Covid-19 restrictions on social activity are concerned, for a while we too enjoyed web-hosted virtual meetings. The group has also evolved a sizeable and active Facebook membership of over 600 participants that helped to keep everyone engaged.

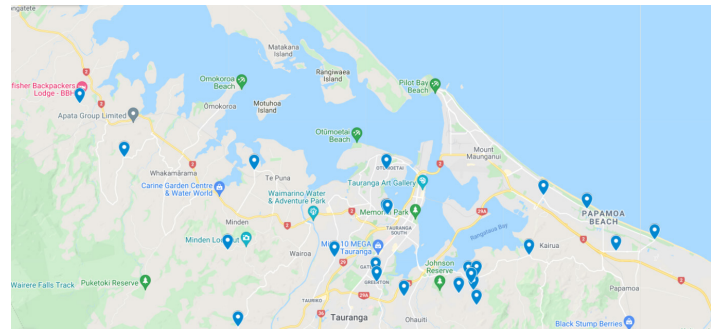
A presence on the internet hosted by Weebly helps us manage the opportunities we can offer. There we use a multi-layer map tool to display members who will collect swarms or carry out Certificates of Inspection, and where we monitor the local results of tutin tests we bulk-submit. We also have three small extractors members can hire, via online booking. To the extent we need to fund things, we cover the cost with a gold-coin donation from the regulars at the monthly meeting or the extractor hire.

For us, the BOP group exists to facilitate shared knowledge and experience, in a social setting where potentially everyone has something to contribute, including people that have never (or never intend to), keep their own honey bees. Keeping bees for a hobby or a business succeeds with good information about many things, for example information about biology, weather and horticulture, carpentry, engineering, to legal, employment, and compliance matters. It's valuable then, that the group appeals to

a wide range of people with different interests. With beekeeping at the core of what we do, providing opportunities to lift the skill of beekeepers beyond proficient to real expertise is an essential process. Rather than teach, our collective role is to provide opportunities to learn, and to learn by doing, by participating, by communicating, and by seeing what is possible.

For a group that started meeting around a Palmers Garden Centre café table nearly ten years ago it's been quite a journey.

**Find us at [www.bopbee.weebly.com](http://www.bopbee.weebly.com), Facebook: BOP Beekeepers (Public Group). or on the New Zealand Beekeeper's forum at [www.NZBees.net](http://www.NZBees.net)** 🐝



*The BOP Bee Interest Group uses an online multi-layered map tool to display the location of swarm collectors or those qualified to carry out hive inspections in their area, simplifying the search process for all involved.*

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# Mitigating Varroa

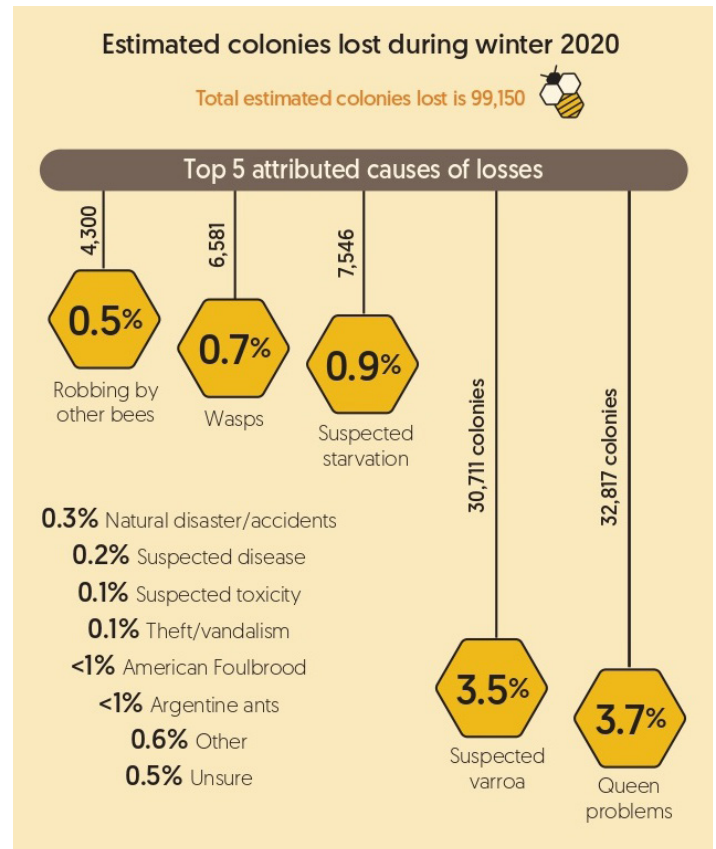


BY JOHN MACKAY

Varroa continues to be the biggest issue for NZ beekeepers. While we wait for the results of the latest Colony Loss Survey, we can look over the 2020 results in the infographic [here](#).

Varroa losses were a leading cause of colony losses in 2020, nearly equal with queen issues. Anecdotal reports this year of major hive losses, with deformed wing virus symptoms in many, suggest the 2021 reading of varroa-related colony losses will not be pretty. A worse situation would be if these losses have not been reported, therefore the issues not highlighted, then beekeepers have few avenues for any investigation or research into potential causes.

This month, we look at some new pieces of work on ways of potentially mitigating some of the effects of varroa. The first looks at repairing the physical puncture wound made by varroa.



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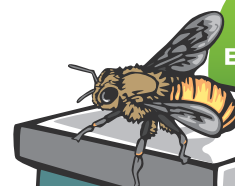


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### WOUND REPAIR

Researchers in Turkey (Özkırım & Küçüközmen 2022) looked at the wounds in the outer hard layer of the bees – a potential source of otherwise harmless bacteria entering and causing disease. Of course viruses may also be entering – but more via injection by varroa. The researchers looked at using chitosan (think prawn and crab shell in a gel) to heal the varroa wounds and mitigate the physical puncture wounds.

Compared to a group with untreated puncture wounds, punctured bees treated with chitosan in different doses healed within three to six days (depending on the amount of chitosan applied) while the untreated bees healed in nine days. Also, the treated bees did not suffer the hair loss that the untreated bees had, suggesting that infection at the puncture sites may be responsible for the hair loss observed.

As an application, chitosan is soluble in varroa-treatment acids such as oxalic acid and thus may be an interesting additive to study in future. However there are limitations to this work. While we now know that varroa get under the abdominal plates to feed on the fat body of bees, this work focussed on thorax-based punctures. Therefore any benefits will need investigation in real-world varroa infestations.

### PROPOLIS TO CURE WHAT AILS?

Another recent paper (Pusceddu, Annoscia et al, 2021) looked at whether propolis was being used as a self-medication against varroa. The benefits of propolis on decreasing nosema and viruses

in a colony have been studied to a limited extent but typically by applying propolis to the walls of a hive.

This new work determined that bees were actually applying propolis to the brood cells prior to eggs being laid by the queen. Then, using artificial cells with and without a propolis layer, the researchers demonstrated that the propolis lowered varroa levels and mortality rates of bees being raised in these cells. Interestingly, the bees actively sought to medicate – when comparing the levels of propolis taken by varroa-infected and non-affected bees, those with varroa took up more of the propolis food.

The anti-microbial affects of manuka honey are well-known. However the anti-microbial affects of the plants themselves are being increasingly studied for their ability to decrease bacterial and pathogen runoff levels when used in riparian planting.

Do bees collect propolis from manuka and kanuka...?

**John Mackay is a molecular biologist and the technical director of Gisborne-based lab dnature Diagnostics and Logistics, as well as a hobby beekeeper.** 🐝

#### References

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# English Mead Meets Irish Charm



Last month we met well-travelled Auckland beekeeper Carol Downer. Among her beekeeping travels was a jaunt to England and Ireland which included a unique mead, and a run-in with border control agents which ended in a uniquely Irish manner...

**The purpose of Carol's trip to the UK and Ireland was to attend the Federation of Irish Beekeepers Association Summer School, visit relatives in the UK and a five day tour of northern England. It also provided a chance to visit the tidal Holy Island of Lindisfarne – renown for not only its historical Christian sites and limited road access due to tidal flows, but also the world famous Lindisfarne Mead.**

Located off the northeast coast of England, Carol travelled by bus to Lindisfarne, crossing the causeway at low tide.

"You've got limited time that you can even get to the place. So, it was a bit of an adventure just to get the mead," she recalls.

Once a bottle of the famous Lindisfarne Mead was purchased, the plan was to take it home to New Zealand and enjoy it at her pleasing. However, that is not how it would play out.

Two weeks and one country later, upon attempt to exit Dublin International Airport to Heathrow with her precious bottle of mead in her handbag, Carol was stopped at Border Control – the bottle of liquid was oversize and its contents were not going to be allowed through. The honey-wine would be confiscated. It was offered as a gift to the female officer, who declined – it was illegal to accept gifts.

Now Carol was majorly upset.

Next the officer, with a smile and in a beautiful Irish lilt offered, "Ooch, It's alright sweetie, I'll escort you back through customs to the terminal, you let me know when you're ready to come back – you can put it in smaller containers or you can drink it!"

Escorted through back corridors, Carol was left standing in the terminal, clutching the famous bottle of mead.


"I had to decide whether I was going to buy 200millileter bottles to divvy it up into, or what I was going to do," Carol explains.

"So, I sat down and while I was deciding what to do a woman came along who was waiting for her daughter to get in from Australia, so I shared it with her. I uncorked it and started drinking on a short time frame," Carol says.

"Then I notified the border officer to fetch me and the empty mead bottle, back through customs, to border control and my passport. I boarded the plane pissed-off... in more ways than one!"

Carol says her mood would have been much worse, if not for the "charming" Irish border control officer who saw the situation to an acceptable outcome for all.

"It's really amazing how the Irish border control handle people. This girl was just so awesome. Taking me back through and leading me to the other side. She was just charming, was so nice, and she could see that I was actually stressed."

So, instead of those stress levels rising higher at seeing an expensive tippie from a remote island go to waste, Carol shared a drink ... or several ... with a new and fleeting friend thanks to some quick thinking from all involved, and journeyed home from her beekeeping sojourn in a rather jolly mood. 



*Carol Downer visits the holy island of Lindisfarne to collect a bottle of mead.*

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**Whangarei Bee Club:** meets on the first Saturday of the month, 10am at Whareora Hall (820 Whareora Road, Whangarei). For details go to [www.whangareibeeclub.co.nz](http://www.whangareibeeclub.co.nz), select 'About Us' and then 'Club Day Invitation'. See you there.

**Franklin Beekeepers Club:** 137 Sim Road, Paerata, Auckland 2580. Meetings on second Sunday of the month, 9.45am start. [www.franklinbees.co.nz](http://www.franklinbees.co.nz).

**Nelson Beekeepers Club:** Waimea Lounge, A&P Showgrounds, Richmond. Meets first Tuesday of the month (except Jan) 7-9pm. [www.nelsonbeekeepers.org.nz](http://www.nelsonbeekeepers.org.nz), email [tasmanbees@gmail.com](mailto:tasmanbees@gmail.com), ph 03 548 6220

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Apiculture New Zealand Conference and Trade Exhibition:** "Sharing Knowledge, Sharing the Load for a Better Future". June 30-July 1, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre. Registrations open now: [www.apinz.org.nz/apinz-conference](http://www.apinz.org.nz/apinz-conference)



## Stocking Stuffer Prize Winners Announced!

Last month *Apiarist's Advocate*, along with Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies, New Zealand Beeswax, Hive World NZ and Ceracell, detailed four great beekeeping gifts – with two lucky readers receiving a surprise under the tree! Here Melissa Murdoch of Milton assembles her new handy corflute nuc box from Ceracell. Melissa, who has just started beekeeping after inheriting a couple of hives from her uncle, took home the Ceracell nuc as well as the Varroa Easy Check 3-in-1 from NZ Beeswax. At the opposite end of the country, fellow new season hobbyist Joanne Warbrick won the other two prizes and they are on their way to Whangarei, Hive World NZ's beekeepers toolbelt and from Ecrotek a Maxant 10" hive tool.

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

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**Editor:** Patrick

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## Creative

**Design:** Ashleigh Ryan

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