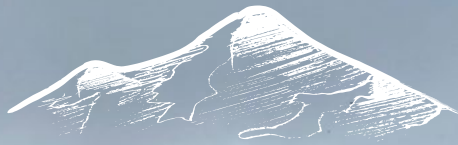


ISSUE 87, OCTOBER 2026

APIARIST'S ADVOCATE

News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers

ESTD 2008
EGMONT
HONEY



Going Green and Going Big

Egmont Honey becomes NZ's largest
beekeeper with the acquisition of an iconic
Central North Island operation.

Egmont Honey – 22,000 Hives and Scope to Grow



One of the country's largest honey exporters recently became the country's largest beekeeping entity as Egmont Honey acquired much of the in-receivership Tweeddale's Honey of Taihape. It takes their hive holding from approximately 5000 to around 22,000 and the chief executive says they expect to only get bigger, but are determined to avoid the pitfalls of "corporate beekeeping".

In March, after 81 years and three generations of family ownership Tweeddale's Honey was forced to receivership, owing more than \$13 million to lenders Bank of New Zealand. Now, following a thorough due diligence process in September, New Plymouth based, but 90 percent Chinese-owned, Egmont Honey has added the around 17,000 beehives, associated beekeeping and honey extraction equipment, a fleet of vehicles, and Tweeddale's 2025-26 crop of honey to their operations.

"I have never wanted to own a significant number of beehives, because every hive is a potential headache and we carry the agricultural risk within the business," says Egmont Honey chief executive James Annabell, who has built significant global honey markets primarily off the back of buying in honey from Kiwi beekeepers.

"At the same time, while we have done well off having a good number of loyal suppliers, including Tweeddale's Honey, you need to predict the future and adapt. I guess that is what we are doing."

Annabell says "timing is everything" and as recently as last month *Apiarist's Advocate* reported on Annabell returning from a visit to key international markets with a warning that, due to the rising prices being requested by beekeepers, sales channels were at risk of being lost.

"Owning beehives two or three years ago would not have made sense. Owning beehives now makes absolute sense. You can only feel for Don and Conchita Tweeddale, because the market has swung significantly. Unfortunately, it was all a little too late for them."



Egmont Honey founder and chief executive James Annabell says "timing is everything" and the time was right for the Taranaki-based company to expand its beehive holding to the largest in New Zealand, and that there is still room to grow.

CHANGING HANDS

The purchase price of the Tweeddale's assets has not been disclosed, but a receivers' report published in May listed almost \$8.5million of "property, plant and equipment" plus \$410,000 in motor vehicles.

Overseas Investment Office approval was not required for the acquisition of the beekeeping assets. Land associated with Tweeddale's Honey has largely stayed with previous owners, husband and wife Don and Conchita Tweeddale. Egmont Honey is now leasing the former Tweeddale's Honey headquarters and honey processing facility in Taihape, and hive-placement agreements with several rural properties owned by the Tweeddals have been struck.

Annabell has personally bought the 1657ha Makopua Station in the Taihape area which was developed by Tweeddale's Honey over an eight-year period with high-UMF mānuka plants.

"I am really excited about that," Annabell says of the purchase.

"I am from a sheep and beef background and it means a lot to me to get back into land. There are a number of interests on the property, including hunting and carbon farming."

TWEEDDALE CONNECTION CONTINUES

Don Tweeddale, having spent almost 50 years at the helm of Tweeddale's Honey, remains involved in the new business in a part-time role assisting honey processing. He is joined there by daughter Kim Squires, while son Steven Tweeddale has returned to work within the significant hive holding spread across the Central North Island. Steven's brother Mark has left the business,



The iconic green beehives of Tweeddale's Honey in the Central North Island have been added to Egmont Honey's operations following a receivership sale in September.

but otherwise all the staff have been retained by Egmont Honey according to Annabell.

"We are happy to be involved with Egmont Honey and James," Don Tweeddale says.

"We are especially happy for all the family members and staff who continue to be employed. I wish them well for the future of their investment."

As for his own "semi-retirement", as he nears 80 years of age, Tweeddale says it is time he "slowed down a bit", but it is important to him to stay active, and involved in operations which his parents began when he was just three years of age. He first took up beekeeping at 10 years-old.

"It will be good to have a little bit more time off to enjoy myself, but I am still focused on the wellbeing of the business and physical work, as well as mental," Tweeddale says.

BRINGING MORE HONEY IN-HOUSE

In recent years Egmont Honey had been a major buyer of the honey produced at Tweeddale's, with the Taihape business their largest supplier. There's an irony in the honey production business not being able to make ends meet and, ultimately, being consumed by its honey buyer. Annabell says it was "market conditions" which saw the Taihape business forced to receivership.

"We were one of many honey buyers and the reason we were getting their honey was because we were providing better payment terms and a better price than the four others they tried to sell too," he says.



The Taihape headquarters of the former Tweeddale's Honey operations remains in the ownership of Don and Conchita Tweeddale who will continue to live on site while leasing the facility to Egmont Honey, with Don to work part-time in honey processing operations alongside daughter Kim Squires, while son Steven Tweeddale will have an apiary role.

Egmont Honey process approximately 2500 tonnes of honey a year according to the CEO, while Don Tweeddale has previously estimated production off their hives to have been 800 to 1000 tonnes "in a normal year", meaning the Tweeddale's acquisition could bring over a third of Egmont Honey's current annual requirements in-house. Annabell says external suppliers will "continue to be the backbone of this business" though.

"Our goal has always been to build long-term relationships and I have retailers here wanting to do three-year deals, should the industry want to get on board with it," he says.

AN "INFORMED" DECISION

While the timing may have been right from Egmont Honey's perspective, it was not a simple decision the chief executive says and considerable due diligence was undertaken.



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"It wasn't necessarily an easy decision but in the end it was an informed decision. After our offer was accepted we carried out significant due diligence and audited every single beehive, and item of equipment. We ensured we had a certain number of hives covered under contract, meaning contracts with landowners now with agreements with Egmont Honey, across mānuka and non-mānuka sites," Annabell says.

The CEO says Egmont Honey staff, including himself, his father Toby Annabell and head beekeeper Mark Thomas, stayed in Taihape for over a week as they sought to inform their decision.

Egmont Honey, with the addition of several dozen former Tweeddale's Honey employees, now employ in excess of 130 people between Taranaki, Taihape and, 130km north, Taumaranui. Since acquiring their new assets a staff recruitment drive has taken place and more than a dozen new employees added, from beekeepers, to truck drivers, to honey processing staff.

Annabell says while Egmont Honey may now be the biggest beekeeping business in New Zealand it is important they don't become "corporate" beekeepers, "because we have seen in the past that beekeepers that get too large are not necessarily the best beekeepers".

He says key to that is reducing the layers of management between field staff and the top level of the company. By himself staying "in a hotel above the Taihape pub for a week, in order to really get into the weeds of the business we were looking to acquire, to really understand it," he believes the decision to buy at the price they have is sound.



The receivers' report into Tweeddale's Honey listed vehicles to a value of \$410,000.

"I really want to understand the business. As much as I can I don't like to do things at arms-length. I like to be absolutely involved, to understand it, so then I can drive the strategy – think big, act small."

The chief executive and business founder says that 'think big, act small' mantra has long guided behaviour at Egmont Honey and they now have a team he has absolute faith in, albeit a lot bigger team than just a month ago. There is room for further expansion too, with enough equipment acquired to house up to 9000 more hives, but that they will be taking a "crawl, walk, run" approach before such expansion.

"The Egmont Honey roller coaster continues," Annabell says of the company that began, in earnest, with the launch of their honey brand in 2015.

"It is another chapter in a business that feels like it has been sprinting for the last 12 years, but I love it." 🐝

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AI Through the Lens of AA



"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Pardon me for stealing from Dickens his most iconic lines – but I wouldn't be the first – and when launching a screed on artificial intelligence, it seems only fitting to draw from a human's original material as a starting point. The great 19th-century novelist wrote those iconic opening lines in his novel set to the French revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*, but they seem a fitting description of our current epoch, the AI revolution.

In these pages in recent years we have addressed AI trends in apiculture only sparingly, given its wide significance across the world we now live in, and we have not conveyed a specific policy regarding the use of AI-generated content within *Apiarist's Advocate*.

In beekeeping "AI" has more commonly referred to 'artificial insemination' of queen bees, but now it seems most minds will logically read AI as 'artificial intelligence'. *Apiarist's Advocate* first made reference to ['The Benefits of AI in Beekeeping'](#) in April 2023 with a column "by" MyApiary director Darren Bainbridge. That column, he revealed at its conclusion, had been entirely composed by ChatGPT. An early indication to most of its seeming 'creative' power, but more importantly the column addressed various methods in which AI was already being used around apiculture. *"We had everything before us..."*

Since then, as the calendar turned to 2024, we ran a two-part series from science writer Dave Black on 'Intelligent Apiculture' ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)). Then in August 2025 Dave's excellent [No More Heroes \(Any More\)](#) delved into the world of hive management software, which has an AI component. *"It was the age of wisdom..."*

We've published more reports and opinion pieces on the AI-issue (Google's AI agent will lay them all out for you if you ask!) but going forward it shapes as the *topic-de-jour* for a few days yet. For this reason we are going to reach out to various people and groups around the industry for their tips, tricks, advice and pitfalls regarding using AI. *"It was the season of Light..."*

Our own analysis and reporting will no doubt increasingly intersect with AI uses, including this month's report *Mānuka Trademark Evidence Files* – 'Let Me Tell You a True Story', as an example of where relying on seemingly AI-generated content, and potentially workflows, can bring you unstuck.

AI AND AA

As for this publication's use of AI, we have no set policy there because the abilities of AI and 'large language models' seem to move so quickly. What I can promise is our written content will continue to originate with human analysis and creativity.

A publisher in 2026 cannot claim that AI will not play a part in those words getting to the page. Afterall, who among us has not relied on spell check, or succumbed to a *right-click -> synonyms* to unearth a replacement word. However, I believe it is human



understanding of the complex issues of our industry that provide the best analysis and so all contributors are expected to originate submissions themselves. Afterall, AI's analysis of our industry often reverts back to knowledge published by *Apiarist's Advocate* anyway.

AI has great value for a publisher as a research agent it must be said (while being sure to determine the source material for information being offered up), and you will have noticed several cartoons or images we have used which have been created through AI. Where possible we will seek to caption such images as AI-generated, but at this point it is readily apparent they are not photos and that is the important determination. We have embraced AI to do the yeoman's work for our podcast, *Apiarist's Advocate Pod*, where an AI agent converts the text of some of our content to audio.

SUPERLATIVE DEGREES OF COMPARISON BEST AVOIDED

Some bright minds have prophesised the end of human civilisation if AI is not shackled appropriately. That's probably a little beyond the scope of this publication to analyse. Thus we will not be one of the *"noisiest authorities"* on the use of AI, but will look to continue to scrutinise its use within our industry in our own way, while using it ourselves in our own, limited, way. In short, we won't insist on AI being received simply *"for good or for evil"* or *"in the superlative degree of comparison only"* but with a more sober, case-by-case analysis.

It's the epoch of artificial intelligence, a technological revolution, and not even the beekeepers will be spared the best and worst of times that come with it. 🐝



Alejandro Gibson
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Mānuka Trademark Evidence Files — ‘Let Me Tell You a True Story’



BY BRUCE ROSCOE

Evidence submitted by Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT) to the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) in the mānuka honey certification trademark case contains promotional website texts that propagate common fictions and have been flagged as generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

The US case is moribund following a suspension notice that USPTO issued to MCT on 31 July. The evidence file in question was submitted 9 July. This report analyses that evidence, the last such to be presented to USPTO before further action on the trademark application was suspended. The application itself was filed 11 December 2024.

The 9 July evidence filing was the second such made by MCT following a 141-page submission made 10 December 2025. Such filings are made in response to the USPTO examiner’s requests for clarifications or additional information.

In a letter accompanying the evidence file, MCT’s US attorney explained to the examiner: ‘MANUKA is not a geographically descriptive term; there is no geographic area known as “MANUKA” in New Zealand. That said, “MANUKA” does indicate New Zealand. See Exhibits A-E.’ Let’s browse those five exhibits, which are all website printouts bundled into an unindexed, 59-page PDF document.

Background to CTM Filings

We detailed the US suspension in our August 13 report [Mānuka Certification Trademark Case Collapses](#) in US. USPTO declared that “mānuka honey” is unregistrable as a certification trademark as it is a “descriptive term” and advised that, in order for the suspension to be lifted, MCT must provide a “disclaimer” saying it does not claim exclusive rights to the word “mānuka”.

Following universal failure of the 2015-2023 campaign to secure a certification trademark, which would confer legal right to control use of the word mānuka, MCT in June 2024 launched a second campaign. Employing arguments based on indigenous rights, it has filed for the same trademark type in New Zealand, Australia, China, Europe, Singapore, UK, and the US. The campaign has stumbled also in New Zealand, Australia, and China.

EXHIBIT A: MARTHA STEWART

Exhibit A is printed from the eponymous website of Martha Stewart, who founded a publishing and lifestyle brand empire and became a TV celebrity. Her empire and reputation floundered when she was sentenced to prison for a felony conviction for insider share trading. Stewart, now age 85, emerged from prison to resuscitate and sell her business.

“CANADA DRY — a vibe shift in a glass” is the advertisement atop the first printout from the entry for manuka honey on marthastewart.com. This ad appears below a tagline of “Top Stories | Best Chicken Lemon Recipes | What Sourdough Does to Your Body”. The page title is, “The Benefits of Manuka Honey — And Why It’s So Expensive”.

The “Distinctions” section can be expected to interest trademark examiners. “...Leptospermum (the tree and flowers) stands out because of its specific...” (we turn the page to find the next line or lines cut out) ...“and freshness,” the author says. Three pages of recipe ratings follow — 3 out of 5 stars for “Carrots with ginger and honey”.

EXHIBIT B: PRIMAL AND ROBOTIC

EXHIBIT B is a printout from the webstore of UMF Honey Association (UMFHA)-certified brand “Primal by Nature”. We see the subject title “Exploring the Cultural Significance of the Mānuka Tree” underneath “OVER \$100NZD | GENUINE MANUKA HONEY | NOTHING ADDED NOTHING TAKEN AWAY”, which is a horizontal news ticker segment frozen in a screenshot.

Bee-on-mānuka flower and product photos bookend text that shows AI authorship characteristics — repetition, disjointedness, the structure “This isn’t that. This is sometime else”, and a robotic



The Mānuka Charitable Trust trademark combines an image of a moko kauae (the traditional Māori tattoo worn by women on their chin) at left with MĀNUKA in capital letters at right. An alternative version does not use a macron over the first A in MANUKA.

touch. One example: "The Mānuka tree isn't just a botanical specimen - it's deeply intertwined with New Zealand's national identity - embodying the very essence of the country's natural beauty, resilience and cultural heritage."

AI also gets caught in an oral history trap, where myth poses as evidence, and becomes too trusting, as in this example: "In Māori folklore, the manuka tea tree was considered a gift from the gods — containing healing powers to protect the people. The honey produced from its nectar was believed to carry the same divine properties and was thought capable of curing illnesses and warding off evil spirits." Leave a comment.

(Entries in websites of the Encyclopedia of New Zealand and NZ History detail the introduction of European honeybees in the 1840s. Native species of bees do not produce honeycomb. The two words in Māori for honey — honi and miere — are borrow words from English and French.)

EXHIBIT C: 'HAILING FROM THE NECTAR'

EXHIBIT C is excerpted from the Aseanz.net website, which serves as a billboard for a Levin-resident business consultant. The consultant champions the application of AI to "business process outsourcing" or BPO. "AI-powered data analytics tools can...extract meaningful insights faster than manual methods", one snippet of advice assures.

The excerpt is titled, "New Zealand's Liquid Gold: An Introduction to Manuka Honey." From low brow to toe, it reads as AI exhaust. It opens with, "Manuka honey...is more than just a sweet indulgence.



Lynell Tuffery-Huria, director of Te Pitau Ltd, the operating arm of MCT, and partner at indigenous rights law firm Kahui Legal, oversees the mānuka honey certification trademark cases. Image: MCT Facebook page.

It represents a blend of tradition, quality, and innovation that sets it apart from other types of honey. Hailing from the nectar of the native Manuka tree, this unique honey has become the symbol of New Zealand's natural heritage."

And: "Long before its modern fame, the Māori utilised Manuka Honey for its medic (sic) qualities, treating wounds and digestive issues. The Manuka tree itself was revered for its healing properties, and the honey harvested from its blossoms became an integral part of Māori traditional medicine".

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Mānuka honey is a “staple in many Kiwi households” and the “preferred choice among New Zealanders”, the printout states. The volume of honey of all types consumed in New Zealand is guessed or unknown. Even when sold in New Zealand, much of the mānuka volume is taken out of the country by international visitors, as Comvita wrote as early as August 2002.

One text segment is headlined “Why Mānuka Honey Is So Expensive | So Expensive” (as if the “So Expensive” point needed repeating.) This text has been lifted from the New York-based digital-only publication *Business Insider*. “There’s a huge opportunity for companies who harness AI first”, *Business Insider* then-CEO Barbara Peng wrote to staff in a 29 May 2025 memo. “We are going all-in on AI.”

A tall bold headline across three lines at page centre closes EXHIBIT C: “Indonesia’s Coffee Journey: From Dutch Colonial Roots to Modern Café”. About Us. Contact Us.

EXHIBIT D: IDENTICAL TWINS

EXHIBITS B and D are twins. Exhibit D, also a webstore printout, promotes the UMFHA-certified brand PURITI. Though page layout, lead image (only slightly), and subheadings vary, the article title and the 44 sentences of text on the Primal by Nature (EXHIBIT B) and PURITI webstores are identical. That’s unsurprising, considering both brands belong to Ashburton-based Midlands Apiaries.

Links to MCT evidence file content

EXHIBIT A: Martha Stewart

<https://www.marthastewart.com/manuka-honey-benefits-11949049>

EXHIBIT B: UMF-certified brand Primal by Nature

<https://primalbynature.com/blogs/news/exploring-the-cultural-significance-of-the-manuka-tree>

EXHIBIT C: ASEANZ website

<https://aseanz.net/2023/10/manuka-honey-in-new-zealand-a-sweet-success-story-from-tradition-to-global-market-growth/>

EXHIBIT D: UMF-certified brand PURITI

<https://www.puriti.com/blogs/puriti-blog/exploring-the-cultural-significance-of-the-manuka-tree>

EXHIBIT E: EYES ON NZ article

<https://www.eyesonnewzealand.com/stories/manuka-a-honey-of-a-plant>

UMFHA: The article cited under the subheading, “AI Boards the Mothership”

<https://www.umf.org.nz/manuka-honey-from-new-zealand-good-from-the-outside-in/>

Link to the Wikipedia article in para 29:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C4%81nuka_honey

Both webstore articles are dated 23 January 2025. An earlier version of the PURITI article, dated 4 June 2020 and titled “The History of Manuka Honey” surfaces only when the URL (website address) is inputted. It may be hidden, but hidden pages are hiding in plain sight from AI.

The 2020 version notes Mary Brumby’s introduction of honeybees to Northland in 1839, the initial unpopularity of mānuka honey, and the Molan confirmation of antibacterial properties in 1980. So far, so good (except correct “1980” to 1988). Unsexy, though, so Molan’s findings were “already known throughout the indigenous Maori population” is tacked on. AI hoovers up this revisionist account for exponential reproduction.

AI BOARDS THE MOTHERSHIP

As AI content examined here has infiltrated the websites of two UMF Honey Association (UMFHA)-certified brands, it seems reasonable to expect that authoritatively sourced information — just the type that would appeal to AI for global dispersion — can be found on the mothership UMFHA website. We’re in luck! The article “Mānuka Honey Bioactivity / Mānuka Honey from New Zealand – Good from the Outside In” (website news section, 11 April 2025) answers the call.

Under the subheading, “What Is Mānuka Honey?”, the article ventures: “Mānuka honey...use dates back to indigenous Māori communities, who valued mānuka for its medicinal properties...” But wait! The photo of a woman raising a spoonful of mānuka honey to her mouth in front of a flowering mānuka tree is “created by AI – ChatGPT”. Could AI also have penned the article? “Yes”, says quillbot AI Detector: “100% of text is likely AI”.

MCT EXHIBITS B, C, and D (D by default because it twins B) are also high-certainty AI creations, according to detectors Copyleaks and GPTZero.

EXHIBIT E: WOULD YOU EAT A KIWI?

EXHIBIT E is a printout of an article titled “MĀNUKA — A HONEY OF A PLANT” from the EYES ON NZ website. New Zealand Story Group, a public-private partnership that promotes “brand New Zealand” through the production of materials to assist exporters, operates the website.

The text reads as advertising copy written by a human in a warm folksy style, as subheadings such as “YOU CAN CALL ME



The USPTO headquarters at 600 Dulany Street, Alexandria, Virginia.
Photo: Wikimedia.

HONEY" and "FANCY A CUPPA" show. It also reads as the only true story in the MCT document.

"Mānuka is...known as a delicious high-quality honey" which is "highly valued throughout the world for its rare and complex properties", the straight-pen text says. The Māori taonga or treasure status of the tree is noted and the multiple uses historically made of the tree explained.

The attractiveness of the tree, honey, and New Zealand as a destination is skilfully bundled — "...if you're looking for somewhere where indigenous trees work with bees to make something awesome... we know a place". EXPLORE MORE.

"THE KIWI BURGER THAT CONTAINS NO KIWI" headlines the last EYES ON NZ article in this printout. The first sentence asks, "Would you eat your national bird?"

WIKIPEDIA CONTAMINATION

Exhibits B and C infect the Wikipedia entry for [mānuka honey](#). Exhibit B — the Midlands Apiaries' brand website excerpt — is the fourth of 36 references cited at the end of the entry and Exhibit C — the replication of Aseanz website content — is the third.

With text references to Māori words such as taonga (valued possession), rongoā (traditional medicine), Tāne (forest god) and allusions to "Māori cosmology" and "spiritual significance", the entry reads in part as MCT-directed if not produced.

Although AI is all-seeing, the USPTO examiner assigned to the MCT application did not need to read beyond the first sentence in the Wikipedia text — 'Mānuka honey is a monofloral honey produced from the nectar of the mānuka tree' — to conclude that "mānuka honey", as a "descriptive term", was unregistrable as a certification trademark.

A TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

The MCT document is not easy to follow. The last sentences on pages 9, 11, 13, 36, 38, 39, and 40 are unintelligible as they break off without continuing onto the next page. The first sentence on page 15 begins in mid-sentence. Four pages are blank except for a URL in the footer.

The US attorney's introduction is combative. He writes that the examiner's assessment of the certification mark application is "incorrect" and advises that the examiner should "follow the guidance presented in TMEP (the USPTO Trademark Manual of Examining Procedure)..."

Advice to 'read the manual' may have caused the USPTO examiner to think, "It looks like attorneys behind this case submitted the evidence document without reading it, and they ask me to 'read the manual'!" The examiner, according to her LinkedIn profile, holds an undergraduate degree in information technology, a postgraduate JD (Juris Doctor) law degree, and has edited a law journal. She may have been the first person to read the MCT document.

Resources for Research

The history of beekeeping in New Zealand can be found on the NZ History and Encyclopedia of New Zealand websites.

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/mary-bumby-brings-the-first-honey-bees-in-new-zealand>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/beekeeping>.

uspto

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(Neither MCT nor its New Zealand or US agent has responded to a request for clarification of whether the subject evidence files were read before submission to USPTO.)

A POST-TRUTH WORLD

Does any of this matter? In a Trumpian post-truth dystopia, it may not. But as an industry and government-funded body that believes the "authentication" of mānuka honey is a birthright, MCT may first wish to authenticate the "evidence" it presents to trademark examiners who hold the power to make its dreams come true.

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

Note: AI-content detection is not an exact science. False positives and false negatives both occur, the former where, for example, AI mistakenly identifies human work as machine produced, and the latter where AI disguises AI by "humanising" the text. Alongside this report we provide links to the websites from which MCT printed out articles for use in its US trademark case. Human or machine or hybrid authorship? Our readers can be the judge. The more important question is the quality of information, regardless of authorship. Our readers can be the judge of that, too. 🐝

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Move to Unite 'Beekeeping Clubs of New Zealand' Gains Momentum



Moves are underway to bring the beekeeping clubs of New Zealand together into a national organisation that could provide a better avenue for reaching many of the country's 7000 hobbyist beekeepers, and create strength in numbers for bee clubs. Led by Auckland Beekeepers Club president Ken Brown, a group comprising representatives from 16 clubs has met online and since then 29 clubs from all corners of the country have been invited to another pivotal online meeting, scheduled for November 2.

Brown conceived the idea of what has been given the working title 'Beekeeping Clubs of New Zealand' following the move of Apiculture New Zealand to Honey and Bees New Zealand (HBNZ), in which hobbyist beekeepers can be members, but without voting rights.

"This is not competitive with Honey and Bees New Zealand. It is supportive of them," Brown is quick to point out, and that support goes both ways, with HBNZ chairperson Murray Bush saying, while the topic has not been officially discussed around the board table, better organised clubs, and thus many non-commercial beekeepers, can only be a good thing.

"It seems a strong move to get all beekeepers involved and a general voice of 'beekeeping New Zealand' on the likes of biosecurity, American foulbrood and the general wellbeing of beekeepers," Bush says.

Brown says he received positive support for the concept from New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). On September 21 he chaired an online meeting where 16 beekeeping clubs were represented, and their interest level in the concept was gauged. It was decided the concept should be progressed 'provided it remains practical, affordable and focused on helping clubs' a written summary of that meeting states.

'Such a body could make it easier to share resources and good beekeeping practice, support clubs, and provide a coordinated voice for club-based beekeepers when one is needed,' the summary adds.

At this stage it is anticipated that Beekeeping Clubs of New Zealand would be open to membership for – as the working title suggests – clubs only and not individuals. Brown invites any beekeeping clubs which have yet to receive an invitation to the November 2 meeting to reach out to the Auckland Beekeepers Club.

Beekeeping clubs are not limited to hobbyist beekeepers and many commercial beekeepers call themselves members of local organisations, but the concept is proposed as a potentially valuable tool for communicating with and coordinating hobbyist apiarists.

"Rather than trying to deal with 5000 or 7000 hobbyist beekeepers, if the clubs were aligned to be a point to send messages to and from it will be really, really helpful, particularly from a biosecurity point of view," says Terry Copeland, MPI's programme director for export growth, and lead of the recently formed 'Bee Alliance'.

"So, we are supportive of Ken and his ambitions, whatever that alliance looks like, we think it is a positive step."

How the group would be structured, whether formally or informally, an incorporated society, or charity, is yet to be determined. Regardless of that form, Brown says he envisages it will provide greater efficiencies to clubs and a collective strength that is much needed.

"Bee clubs are struggling around the country, with the internet a source of information, it's hard for them to stay relevant and keep members," Brown says.

"If we can support each other, we will help each other with intellectual property and the likes, and collectively support increased memberships, which will make it more normal that hobbyists join bee clubs. That way, best practice information can be spread more easily, especially during biosecurity concerns. And then we can work together with all the other relevant bodies, so there's no argy-bargy or conflicts of interest."

Talk of financing the group at the September 21 meeting saw any decision in that regard postponed, with it likely to be a key consideration at the larger November 2 online meeting.

HBNZ's constitution allows for "affiliate" bodies which could potentially include a collection of bee clubs should the new group formalise. For now though, Bush is happy to see a complementary beekeeping group take flight.

"HBNZ is clearly a commercial beekeeping driven organisation, but, because of biosecurity and because of AFB, plus general interests in beekeeping, like varroa, that are across the board, we have to build a hobby structure into an HBNZ structure," Bush says.

"What is being proposed could give us the communication framework to allow the two to exist. There are massive potential synergy and complimentary benefits between the two. So, we are working with Ken to support the group wherever it is going." 



Ken Brown, Auckland Beekeepers Club president, had the idea and is leading the charge for a national-level group to represent beekeeping clubs.

HBNZ puts out a “Call to Arms”



Just over two months from its launch, Honey and Bees New Zealand (HBNZ) is calling on beekeepers, whether they are members or not, to let their opinions be heard and help shape the new commercial-beekeeper-centric group.

Around a year of consultation with industry went into shaping the HBNZ constitution which replaced Apiculture New Zealand, which had operated since 2016. There is plenty more work to be done to more fully develop the new organisation though, and the wider beekeeping community will need to step up to help set direction and drive progress, chairperson Murray Bush believes.

“The thing that has been missing in the last eight weeks has been involvement from beekeepers,” Bush says.

The group sent out an email to several industry mailing lists on September 25 that outlined the goal of the group – ‘To create a single unified beekeeping organisation that highlights and supports the strategic, economic, and social importance of Honey, Bees, and Beekeepers within Aotearoa/New Zealand’ – as well as its purpose and how it plans to get there. It also stated ‘If we want to achieve our “How” list stated above, the time has arrived where we need to generate action from all beekeepers across NZ.’

“It’s a call to arms. We now need to do something constructive and active. The sooner we get things in place the better and it is time for beekeepers to drive where they want HBNZ to go, not the board,” Bush explains.

“It’s one thing to say ‘we want an organisation’, but now we need to start putting names down for sub-groups or sub-committees to be created. Now is the time to build what we think our future should look like and a board of seven is not going to run HBNZ, it is the beekeepers who are going to drive it.”

The email also appeals to those beekeepers who are not members to let them know what must be done to build their confidence.

‘Our stated purpose is healthy bees and healthy Beekeepers. What does that mean or look like from your perspective?’ the email asks, calling on email responses to info@honeyandbees.nz. 🐝

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Where Are We Now? Hornet Response Enters Second Spring



BY ELOISE MARTYN

With no new yellow-legged hornet detections since April, Biosecurity New Zealand is stepping up surveillance this spring as the risk of surviving queens emerging from winter increases. Trapping continues, new tracking technology is being introduced, and scientists are trialling freshwater eDNA testing as another possible detection tool.

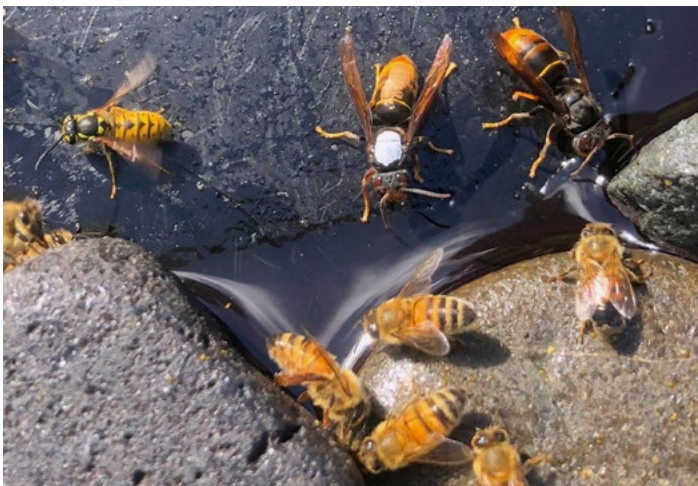
The yellow-legged hornet response in Auckland is entering a critical new phase this spring. According to Biosecurity New Zealand, trapping has continued through winter, surveillance and apiary monitoring are now being increased for the high-risk spring period and public reporting remains a key part of the response.

In a September press release, Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard said the response had already destroyed 77 queens and 132 nests, with no hornets seen since April.

"That's encouraging, but we are not out of the woods yet."

"If any mated queens survived winter, they may start emerging in the coming weeks to build new nests.

"That is why we need Aucklanders to stay alert. If you think you have seen a yellow-legged hornet or nest, take a photo if it is safe, and report it straight away. Early reports give us the best chance of finding and destroying any new nests before they become established."



A comparison between yellow-legged hornets, honey bees and German wasp. The yellow-legged hornet in the centre of the picture has white and orange paint markers to help trace it to its nest. You can compare their size to honey bees (foreground) and the German wasp (left). The yellow-legged hornet on the right shows the colouring of their legs – black thighs with yellow on the lower half of the leg. Paper wasps have yellow legs and are often mistaken for hornets. Photo: MPI.

TRAPPING, TRACKING AND ERADICATING

Mike Inglis, commissioner north, Biosecurity New Zealand, says 1200 traps are already deployed and being monitored.

"If hornets are detected again this season, then bait stations with carbohydrate lures will be used like they were last season – to track and trace hornets to their nests, so that nests can be controlled."

Inglis says the technology has also been refined for this season.

"In the event we discover hornets and need to track and trace them to nests, we have smaller radio trackers to deploy this season. This means we'll be able to attach the tiny transmitters to smaller hornets than we were able to previously."

Public surveillance will also be important as potential queens emerge from overwintering with the threat to establish new nests, which last season were often found on homes and structures such as fences and carports.

"The more than 18,000 public notifications we received last season were key to our response success so far," Inglis says.

He adds that a new initiative involves asking the public to register homemade traps.

"We have one new initiative where we're asking members of the public who have home-made traps to register these with us. This will give us a clearer picture of the spread of traps out there (over and above our network)."

Biosecurity New Zealand has started its spring advertising campaign, with digital billboards, digital ads and social media targeting predominantly Auckland's North Shore, alongside some nationwide coverage.

A NEW eDNA APPROACH

Alongside traditional surveillance, scientists at the Bioeconomy Science Institute Maiangi Taiao (BSI) are trialling environmental DNA, or eDNA, sampling of freshwater around Auckland's North Shore.

BSI entomologist Andrew Pugh, who is leading the freshwater eDNA project, says the approach is similar to wastewater testing for Covid-19 presence, which many New Zealanders are familiar with.

"We are essentially leveraging waterways as natural collectors of genetic material. Even insects that aren't aquatic shed cells, tissues, and biological material into the environment, which can be detected through eDNA testing," Pugh explains.

Water samples will be collected from streams and small waterways around the North Shore.

"This technology has successfully detected pest wasps so we know it works, but what makes this research exciting is this will be the first time eDNA testing has been used in a New Zealand biosecurity insect incursion response.

"If successful, this work could help identify areas of hornet activity to quickly track down hard-to-find nests, and to optimise field deployment of surveillance traps."

The eDNA techniques are still in the "proof of concept" phase though and thus it is too early to say how, longer-term, they might fit into the overall response.



A close up of the yellow-legged hornet shows the hornet's orange face, dark antennae and yellow-socked legs. Photo: MPI.

"Once it demonstrates an ability to provide real operational benefits, we will work to see how it could be integrated into the wider system." Inglis says.

With spring now well underway and the threat of yellow-legged hornets emerging at any time, vigilance remains important. For anyone who sees a suspected yellow-legged hornet or nest, the message remains simple: take a photo and report it immediately to Biosecurity New Zealand (0800 80 99 66).

Info on how to build a homemade hornet trap and register it is available [here](#). 

Winners!

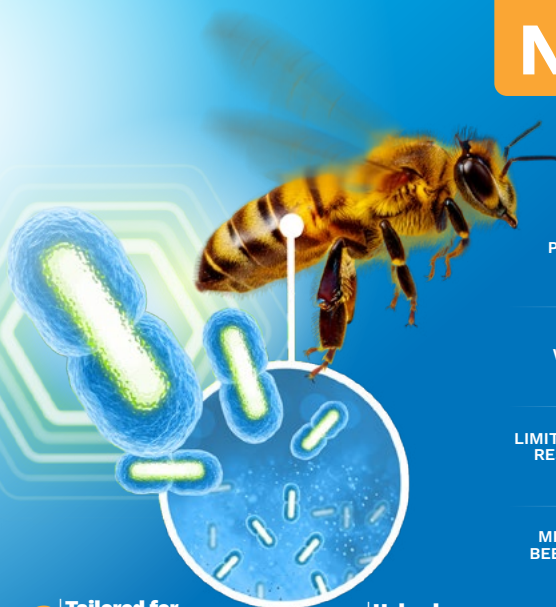
MPI and Biosecurity NZ's yellow legged hornet response has been recognised with the Innovation Award at the 8th annual Spirit of Service Awards, announced in Wellington October 1, to recognised high achieving public sector projects.

The hornet response beat out two fellow finalists which have been harnessing AI. HealthX, a Health NZ programme utilising AI and digital solutions to improve frontline efficiency; and a Ministry of Justice Programme using AI agents.



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Bee Alliance Convenor – “It was Everything I Wanted it to Be”



On September 10, after five months of planning, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)-led “Bee Alliance” gathered in Wellington for the first time, bringing together representative groups from most corners of apiculture and even some growers.

“I’ve managed to get everyone to base camp, and that in itself is an achievement, but now we have to climb the mountain,” is how MPI programme director for export growth Terry Copeland summarises the first Bee Alliance gathering.

Copeland first reached out to various groups from around the beekeeping industry in May to test the mood of the industry for a gathering, potentially regularly, that would allow the Ministry greater understanding of the apiculture industry and provide support.

Among those who made the invite list and attended the inaugural gathering in the capital were Honey and Bees New Zealand (HBNZ), UMF Honey Association (UMFHA), Mānuka Charitable Trust, New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated, NZ Bee Health and Biosecurity, Auckland Beekeepers Club president Ken Brown, and Comvita chief executive Karl Gradon.

“It was everything I wanted it to be and the organisations we talked about including all came,” Copeland says.

Following the meeting HBNZ and UMFHA released a statement extolling its success.

“The meeting provided a renewed sense of optimism that, through the Alliance, we can build cohesion across the sector, coordinate and align efforts, pool resources, and achieve more together,” HBNZ chairman Murray Bush says.

Copeland says the day was divided into several sessions, with the first determining what the purpose of the Alliance should be – “Distinct from the individual organisations who are already out there doing their own thing”.

Three main areas will shape that purpose according to Copeland. Firstly, unity across the value chain.

“If we can create visibility and unity across the value chain we will all be better off. At governance level, above all the individual organisations, would be the place to do that,” Copeland says.

Collaboration to improve productivity was also defined as a key purpose – “How do we improve productivity from a governance level, with a macro view? The Alliance might be quite helpful in that regard.”

Thirdly, cohesion in better telling the industry’s story was identified as needed.

“The honey exporters talk about product in market, but we don’t have a cohesive story that talks about the benefit of bees. Whether it is pollination, ecosystem health, the amazing products generated from beehives beyond just honey, the health and wellbeing products. How do we tell our story more holistically, and tell it better?” Copeland says.

The Alliance was conscious it did not want to make meetings a “talkfest” Copeland reports, and so a programme of work scope has been set which includes data collection; biosecurity and a better understanding of varroa; and pollination.

There was strong support for monthly meetings going forward Copeland says, and so dates have been set in October, November and December for the Alliance to again meet in Wellington, with the next scheduled for October 16. 🐝

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MPI's Terry Copeland says the first Bee Alliance hui in Wellington featured several sessions, to define a purpose, to determine what commitment to the Alliance should look like, and set an initial programme of work scope.

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Mānuka Multifloral	MGO 70+	\$10.00	\$14.00
Mānuka Multi & Mono-Floral	100 MGO & UMF® 5+	\$16.00	\$20.00
Mānuka Mono-Floral	UMF® 7+	\$20.00	\$25.00
Mānuka Mono-Floral	UMF® 10+	\$28.00	\$34.00
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Thank you to everyone that responded to our new "BEE UP FRONT" Honey Buying Price Guide. Feedback has been very positive, so we are looking forward to this being a regular feature in the *Apiarist's Advocate*.

Please note that there was a typo in last month's copy. Robin Jay's email is robin.jay@nzmanukagroup.com and not co.nz as previously advertised, our apologies to anyone who may not have had a response to emails sent. We look forward to working with you all as the industry heads into the exciting new era.

The team at New Zealand Mānuka Group

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'You Have Misspelled "Manuka"'



In our September edition, we carried a report on the Kānuka Industry Hui held in Rotorua 17-18 August, *Kānuka Honey: Time to Stand on Its Own*. It was “unmistakable”, the report said, that the “market opportunity” for kānuka honey and kānuka oil was “already there”. Bruce Roscoe discusses “market opportunity” for non-mānuka honey types and backgrounds the Treaty of Waitangi reports that bear on the question of naming rights for the words kānuka and mānuka.

BY BRUCE ROSCOE

One can only marvel at the fortitude of those who strive to reach a new honey frontier beyond the mānuka-clad hills and dare to dream that prosperity may await. They have embarked upon a journey as perilous as Odysseus from Troy to Ithaca, as narrated by Homer in his epic poem. Odysseus walked and sailed over 10 years, and it may take kānuka proponents as long to gain a toehold in any market.

When shown a jar of kānuka honey, I heard a Tokyo trade show visitor ask, ‘Haven’t you misspelled “mānuka”?’ At a later promotion, two visitors tasted mānuka and kāmahī honeys. One chose the mānuka, the other the kāmahī. The visitor who had chosen the mānuka turned to the other visitor and said, “If you are buying New Zealand honey, you should buy mānuka. It is the real thing.” Hearing this, the visitor who had chosen the kāmahī reluctantly returned it to the table and picked up a jar of mānuka.

The trade show visitor had asked a fair question. Writing mānuka as kānuka is an easy enough typographical error to make.

On a QWERTY keyboard, you lower your right hand to the bottom row of letters and position your index finger over the “m” key. But your finger settles on the key immediately above and a bee’s wing to the right. You type the letter “k” and complete “kānuka” as though nothing is amiss.

Japan is an instructive market. From the outset, mānuka honey was regarded as a quasi-stomach cancer treatment. UK research (1994) showed that mānuka honey inhibited growth of the bacteria *Helicobacter pylori*, which can lead to stomach cancer.¹ At the time, thanks to a heavily salted seafood diet, Japan suffered one of the highest rates of stomach cancer. The research resonated in a wide spectrum of Japanese society. Although efficacy had been shown only in a laboratory and not a clinical trial, if there was even a small chance of the lifting of a death sentence, mānuka honey would win place as an alternative medicine. Which it did, and demand later extended to influenza prevention.

Japan was Comvita’s first choice for establishment of an overseas subsidiary (2002). Because of its weight in the industry, Comvita serves as a type of bellwether for workable ideas. No mention of kānuka can be found in Comvita annual reports over 23 years and in only one year are non-manuka honeys introduced (clover and rewarewa; 2015).

THE DIAMETER OF THE SKY

An import permit hurdle — in effect, a ban; no New Zealand law bans the import of honey — shields local fare from foreign competition. This protection can create a view of the world that a frog in the well would hold, where the frog looks up, measures the diameter of the sky, realises that it matches the diameter of the well, and believes that what works in the well should work in the world. In this view, the world’s arms can be opened to embrace kānuka and other non-mānuka honey types.



This cartoon was generated by ChatGPT.

Japan imported honey from 48 countries in CY2024. Main suppliers were the usual suspects China, Argentina, and Canada, while among exotic origins were Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, and Lithuania. Japan's largest upper tier supermarket chain (Seijo Ishii; 238 stores) stocks honeys from around 15 countries. It has selected about 20 New Zealand honey products — all are mānuka, in various grades, from four suppliers. (Otago white clover comb honey was stocked until around 2020 but withdrawn over glyphosate contamination fears. Hungarian comb honey has taken its place.)

The mānuka labels on the Seijo Ishii selection show MGO (methylglyoxal), UMF (Unique Manuka Factor), and dual MGO / UMF ratings. Among the offerings of the four suppliers, the lineup from a South Island packer is typical — MGO30+ (which almost certainly is multifloral mānuka but labelled only as "mānuka"), MGO83+, MGO263+, and MGO515+. (The MGO values 83, 263, and 515 are piggy-backing off UMF5+, 10+, and 15+ values.)

The Seijo Ishii thinking is, MGO and UMF are both recognised, so both are needed. Two suppliers of each rating type, and at least three grades within those types, are needed in the event that one supplier falls over or runs out of stock of a key grade. Failure to supply key grades, especially during peak mānuka season — late autumn to early spring in the northern hemisphere — is unacceptable to the point of relationship fracture.

In what is essentially a real estate business where products are expected to pay rent in the form of margin on turnover

for the shelf space they occupy, slow- or non-payers are soon evicted. Before they risk placing a slow-moving non-mānuka honey, purchasing managers will explore mānuka options such as organically certified product, or derivative products such as lozenges or nasal sprays, or explore further the range of antibacterial honeys and add, as often seen, Australian jarrah honey.

Kānuka will not get an audience with a retailer's purchasing department. Even if it did, it would fail the final test of whether store staff could explain to customers the difference between mānuka and kānuka, when it is already difficult to explain mānuka label ratings. For customer service at supermarkets and food boutiques, a basic knowledge of some 5,000 products is required.

Non-mānuka honeys are sold mainly through webstores where space allows for detailed introduction and multiple graphic presentation but even then, more often than not, they are bundled with at least one other product whose name includes the word "mānuka".

The cement of "all worlds are mānuka" has been poured and dried by the UMF Honey Association (UMFHA). Since incorporating in September 2002 (and informally for two-three years earlier), UMFHA has deployed some NZD24.3m in a global effort to champion only mānuka honey. UMFHA promotes mānuka as the "gold standard" against which "other honey and natural health foods are compared" (UMFHA website). In that sense, all non-mānuka honeys are slated as inferior.

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EXCLUSION AND REMOVAL

In large part, kānuka is a story of exclusion and removal. Along with mānuka, it belonged to the *Leptospermum* genus, as *Leptospermum ericoides*, until 1983, when it was reclassified into the *Kunzea* genus. Since then, the genus has been split into 10 varieties endemic to New Zealand. Of those 10, seven were announced as new in 2014 research.²

Australia has some 80 species of *Leptospermum* and maintains it can call honey from the nectar of any of them “manuka”, while New Zealand has countered that authentic mānuka honey can be produced only from New Zealand-sourced *Leptospermum scoparium*.

Here’s the rub. The kānuka lobby appears to believe that honey produced from the nectar of any of the 10 *Kunzea* species — whether *robusta* from the North and South Island, *tenuicaulis* from only the North Island, or *ericoides* from only the South Island — can be called “kānuka”. (Australia has some 50 species of *kunzea* tree.)

Kānuka honey was excluded from the governmental New Zealand Story honey video project in 2020, which limited its selection to kāmahī, mānuka, clover, and multifloral honeys. Titled “New Zealand Honey Story”, the script did not venture much beyond “...there’s such an amazing variety of beautiful flavours”.

The Ministry for Primary Industries’ (MPI) 2018 scientific definitions for mānuka honey took aim at kānuka as an impostor. As a result, the number of New Zealand Customs export codes for honey was expanded from 8 to 17 in a largely binary system where honeys were or were not mānuka in the categories of bulk and retail pack and monofloral and multifloral and “other”.

Nine codes now include the word “mānuka” and 8 (comb, honeydew, and various “other”) do not. Because neither MPI definition nor export code exists for kānuka honey, export certificates for that honey type will state only “HONEY”. As a result, no kānuka data for any market can be collated.

Mānuka honey across all codes accounted for 89.5% of the 11,433.4 tonnes of honey New Zealand exported in CY2025 and 93.1% of the NZD448.9m value.



Kānuka is abundant in swaths of New Zealand’s landscape, but to this point the honey generated is yet to establish a presence in any overseas market. Instead, most kānuka honey gathered each summer likely ends up in mānuka honey products.

Though the MPI scientific definition for monofloral mānuka honey may outwardly appear to exclude kānuka honey, botanical science and the dark arts of honey blending suggest a more complex world. Comvita, in its 53-page, June 2017 submission to MPI argued that the definition failed in its intent to authenticate mānuka honey. Kānuka lay at the heart of the argument.³ The chemical marker 3-phenyllactic acid (3-PLA), one of the four markers in MPI’s monofloral definition, was found in both kānuka and mānuka, and regional variation could determine inclusion or exclusion as mānuka. (Northland mānuka honey producers in particular believe that they are unscientifically penalised by the definitions.) Comvita believes that a large volume of kānuka can be sold as mānuka and, ironically, has found that some honey labelled as kānuka meets the monofloral mānuka definition.

At a time when news media at home and abroad were screaming “fake mānuka”, MPI only reluctantly stepped in to regulate. For years, half the industry had believed that kānuka should not be sold as mānuka, and the other half believed that it could. The industry, left to itself, could never agree on a definition of this honey type. The picture that emerges nearly a decade after the enforcement of the definitions is one where major honey packers do not need to promote kānuka honey, because they may already be making profitable use of it. And offshore mānuka brands, unencumbered by official scientific definitions, particularly in Australia and UK, can be expected to welcome kānuka in bulk at bush honey prices.

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THE TAONGA TAUTOLOGY

The report on the Rotorua hui stated: "Kānuka is regarded as a taonga species by Māori". Which is tautological, considering that absolute Māori rights of ownership and control (te tino rangatiratanga) are asserted for *all native flora and fauna* species in the WAI 262 claim of October 1991. (WAI claims refer to claims made under the Treaty of Waitangi through the Waitangi Tribunal.)⁴

This claim mentions neither kānuka nor mānuka. As specific concerns, it cites four species of flora (kumara, pohutukawa, koromiko, the climbing plant puawananga) and three species of fauna (the flax snail pupu harakeke, tuatara, and the wood pigeon kereru) and adds "indigenous export timbers, various species". The word 'taonga' (valued possession) occurs in the 28-page claim only in relation to the flax snail and native timbers.

The WAI 262 report that answered the 1991 claim was issued July 2011. Over 298 pages, it found no space to mention 'kānuka'. Impressed that, "Today mānuka oil and mānuka honey are the basis for a multi-million-dollar industry...", it sketched research and industry developments in 33 mānuka references and, across multiple fields, sent 'taonga' into overdrive (626 mentions).

Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT; February 2020) is born of the WAI 262 claim and response, as is Kānuka Charitable Trust (KCT; March 2023). KCT is addressed to indigenous rights law firm, Kāhui Legal (Wellington), which oversees the mānuka honey certification trademark cases pursued by MCT.

LET THE DO-I BEGIN

If the "market is already there", let a do-i follow the hu-i held by the kānuka lobby. Design labels, order in jars, warm the honey in the drums, stir and pour and pack and chill the honey, draw up presentation materials that anchor to an authoritatively and persuasively presented website, and seize the market that is already there.

Bruce Roscoe is a Japan-resident researcher and former foreign correspondent and securities analyst who has worked as a honey import and distribution consultant in Japan since 2012. 🐝

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3. MPI has virtually hidden the June 2017 Comvita submission by bundling it with other submissions and has heavily redacted it. The bundle can be downloaded from this [MPI link](#). The Comvita submission can be found on pages 130-183 of the PDF. Bookmarks (type Ctrl + B) reveal key content underlying the redactions. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/20387/direct>
4. The WAI 262 claim of 1991 can be downloaded from the [Wai 262 website](#) and the WAI 262 report of 2011 from the [Waitangi Tribunal website](#).

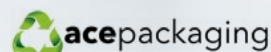
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Pact Group's manufacturing philosophy is built on a foundation of integrity, accountability and continuous improvement. Pact is committed to maintaining high standards of business ethics across all operations and stakeholder relationships. As a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact, Pact aligns its operations and business strategy with internationally recognised principles covering human rights, labour standards, environmental responsibility and anti-corruption.

Environmental stewardship is an important focus for Pact Group. Pact Group is committed to supporting the circular economy, and the company continuously strives to improve the environmental performance of its operations, products and services. This commitment helps customers partner with a supplier that places sustainability at the forefront while delivering practical packaging solutions that meet commercial requirements.

MATERIALS AND METHODS PROVIDING BEEKEEPERS THE QUALITY THEY NEED

The quality of every steel drum begins with carefully selected raw materials. Pact Group uses quality cold-rolled mild steel coil manufactured to controlled specifications for thickness, strength, hardness, surface finish and formability. These material characteristics are critical to producing steel drums that provide the durability, consistency and reliability required for demanding storage and transport environments.

Manufacturing is undertaken at dedicated facilities in Avondale, Auckland, and Temuka, South Canterbury. These strategically

located sites provide nationwide production and distribution capability, helping customers maintain reliable supply across both the North and South Islands. Local manufacturing can provide greater responsiveness, shorter lead times and increased supply chain security.

Quality assurance is embedded throughout every stage of production. Both manufacturing sites are certified to ISO 9001:2015, demonstrating Pact Group's commitment to structured quality management systems, operational excellence and continual improvement. This certification provides customers with confidence that products are manufactured under applicable internationally recognised quality standards designed to ensure consistency and reliability.

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As a supplier of food-contact packaging, Pact Group has a strong focus on food safety. Both manufacturing facilities operate comprehensive risk-based Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) programmes. These systems identify, assess and control potential food safety risks throughout the manufacturing process, helping ensure that drums used for food products meet applicable safety requirements.

Pact Group's regulatory compliance team works to ensure that food-contact packaging solutions comply with applicable regulations and standards.

Additional manufacturing controls are implemented to protect product quality during storage and transportation. Steel drums are flushed with dehumidified air before dispatch to minimise internal condensation and reduce the risk of corrosion. This process helps preserve drum integrity.

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By combining local manufacturing, quality management systems, food safety expertise, regulatory compliance and commitment to sustainability, Pact Group provides steel drum manufacturing solutions for customers in New Zealand. Through Stowers Containment Solutions, customers gain access to dependable, quality steel packaging solutions that meet applicable regulatory requirements, supported by an experienced manufacturing partner committed to delivering long-term value and exceptional performance. ■



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Bee Informed and Bee in Control of the Industry's Future



Last month New Zealand Mānuka Group published something not seen for many years in the New Zealand honey industry, a honey pricing schedule titled "Bee Up Front". Now chief executive Phil Caskey expands on his and the company's philosophy and vision for the industry where the UMF brand is better harnessed to protect the value of mānuka honey.

BY PHIL CASKEY

Recently the new industry group Honey and Bees New Zealand called for submissions to help design the 'beekeeping industry organisation we all want and need'. For beekeepers to get there though, I believe we need to understand the wider industry position that is influencing our honey markets, and then make informed business decisions to shape the future we collectively want.

BEE INFORMED – THE MARKETS

Most market prices are holding steady with many large packing companies holding up to two years of stocks purchased at lower prices. The lift in honey prices seen earlier this year have been absorbed into these stock holdings, so are not impacting prices being offered into the market at this stage.



Phil Caskey, along with wife Sharan, is one of the mānuka honey industry's earliest adopters. The New Zealand Mānuka Group owner says urgent action is needed before the "goose that lays the golden egg" is destroyed.

There has been strong new interest for New Zealand mānuka honey from South Korea, India and some European markets and the free trade agreement with India offers real potential, albeit with a quantity cap. Australia and Germany are also vying for the mānuka honey business in India and there is a lot of confusion over all the quality and marker acronyms. Ironically Germany is offering New Zealand mānuka honey to the India market and Middle East from its bulk mānuka imported stocks which are being packed in Germany and reexported.

A lot of the market growth and interest in mānuka honey is for bulk honey being exported in drums as multi-floral mānuka, and being packed overseas away from our own MPI regulations on floral type and labelling. This is now starting to undermine prices and in some cases is ending up in added value products such as skin care and medical devices. This has the potential to weaken the credible reputation of genuine New Zealand monofloral mānuka that we have spent the last 30 years building for our industry.

AN INDUSTRY IN RECOVERY – OR IS IT?

There is a fundamental difference between what can be described as a thriving industry and what is an oasis of thriving businesses. Over recent years the New Zealand apiculture industry has suffered from a condition called oligopsony. That is an industry imbalance where a small number of buyers dominate and control the purchasing side of the market, facing a vast number of independent sellers. Consequently, beekeepers are forced into being price takers which over recent years has been at prices that barely, or in some cases don't, cover operating costs while some large packer and marketing business have thrived. Then, in some cases, sold to overseas investment interests.

With more and more beekeepers being forced to look at exporting their honey in drums at slightly better prices, this honey is being packed overseas without New Zealand's stringent label restrictions. The double irony is that these products are inevitably putting further downward pressure on credible high-grade monofloral mānuka being packed here. So, seller BeeWare and choose wisely when selling your honey.

With returns back to beekeepers starting to improve, the power is shifting away from the "cash now" buyers, so beekeepers can start to negotiate better returns, hold stock themselves and select genuine buying partners that are supporting the New Zealand beekeeping industry to get better returns, rather than benefiting offshore investors or bulk overseas buyers.

At the end of the day there is no industry without beekeepers and it saddens me to see their life's work get taken away because of a monopsony or oligopsony power situation that is totally out of their control.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

In order for the industry to thrive it first must move back to being an equitable industry where wealth and stability are shared across all levels and profits are distributed fairly from beekeepers, extractors, processors and marketers.

While exporting bulk honey in drums for a few dollars more than being offered locally has been necessary for some beekeepers to shift inventory surpluses to survive in recent years, the reality of this value-add bleed is that we are forfeiting around \$40 million NZD in value-add margins annually.

To help us make "The New Zealand Honey Industry Great Again" we need to look at more ways of adding value here in New



Zealand and should support buyers who are adding value locally and offering fair and equitable returns to their suppliers. Currently mānuka honey based value-add products sit across four main primary market sectors: food and beverage, cosmetics and personal care, pharmaceutical and medical wound care, and nutraceuticals and dietary supplements.

Each of these sectors offer significant opportunities for growth and development for value-add mānuka based products. Developing new products across all these sectors will require significant investment and strategic long-term market development commitment.

In order to underwrite and support this development as an industry, we need to work together to guarantee consistent and price-stable supply throughout the year. Strategic supplier/developer/marketer relationships are critical to its success, and this can only work if there is full cooperation right across the industry.

UMF® - PROTECTING OUR IP AND QUALITY MARK ENDORSEMENT

By looking to Fonterra and their domestic focused processing where around 15,000 jobs are created and value-added returns shared back to its suppliers, and Zespri and their strong IP protection directly benefiting its suppliers, we can see a pathway to success. The mānuka honey industry has been trying to create IP protection, but it seems the horse has bolted there.

While there is merit in us fully supporting the indigenous heritage ownership approach and branding this accordingly, we should not overlook the fact that the industry already owns the global rights to an internationally respected quality mark and brand, UMF. However, it is only hanging on by a thread because of a lack of full industry support and a deliberate manipulation of its endorsement by some brands. It needs all of our support in order to survive and thrive as a globally recognised consumer product quality endorsement.

A DUAL BRAND APPROACH

There is a unique opportunity for our industry to take centre stage in our global markets with mānuka honey harvested, processed and packed in New Zealand using a dual brand endorsement approach. With our globally recognised quality mark UMF and the proposed new indigenous heritage mark being championed by Mānuka Charitable Trust (MCT), acknowledging mānuka's deep rooted connection to its people and the whenua that mānuka grows on, this combination would be totally unique to New Zealand. It could guarantee country of origin heritage status and allow brands to wear a fully endorsed and, hopefully, government supported product quality mark.

This system would allow for control systems to be implemented throughout the whole supply chain from hive to marketing and

provide a platform for beekeepers and landowners to also become certified suppliers of premium grade honey. It could be used as a global marketing platform for all certified brands but would only work if both mono and multifloral mānuka honeys came under its management systems.

One of the concerns the writer has with the current structure of these organisations (UMF Honey Association and MCT), is the potential push/pull control limitations creating trust issues. On one hand there is potential for a strong bias toward indigenous benefit and on the other hand there is a strong bias toward packer and marketer benefit or control which, in UMFHA's case, is conflicted by packer and marketers not necessarily wanting to see the UMFHA having influence over the multifloral market sector. Uncontrolled and non-policed this sector allows them greater market manoeuvrability.

We need to take urgent action before we destroy the goose that laid the golden egg. UMF monofloral mānuka honeys hold global market credibility, but low-MGO honey continues to undermine its credibility, and bulk exports don't provide us anywhere near the control we need.

It's your industry and its time to "Bee In Control", support change for good, choose wisely when selling your honey and help create 'the industry we all want and need'.

Phil Caskey is the chief executive and owner, along with wife Sharan, of New Zealand Mānuka Group. They have been involved in the mānuka honey industry since its earliest days in the 1990s, from hive ownership, to honey packing, marketing and quality control. 🐝



The export of bulk honey in drums is not only putting downward price pressure on New Zealand-packed mānuka honey in key global markets, but is undermining the credibility of mānuka honey through its use in off-shore created health, wellness and even medical products made to questionable standards says Phil Caskey.



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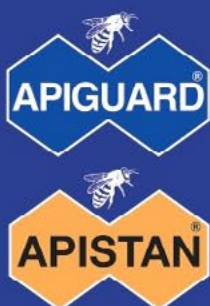


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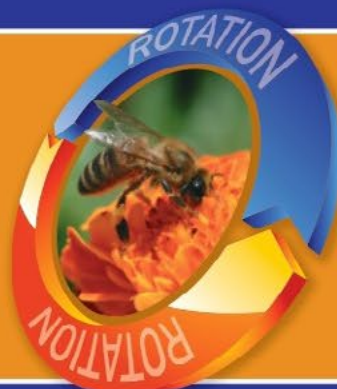
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Hobby Beekeeping and Varroa – Monitor, Treat, Rotate, Repeat,



Hobby beekeepers lose a disproportionate rate of colonies over winter, compared to commercial operators, the NZ Colony Loss Survey has long told us. However, that same survey shows there are some simple actions hobby beekeepers can take to help improve the chances of colony survival, explains departing survey lead Pike Stahlmann-Brown.

BY PIKE STAHLMANN-BROWN

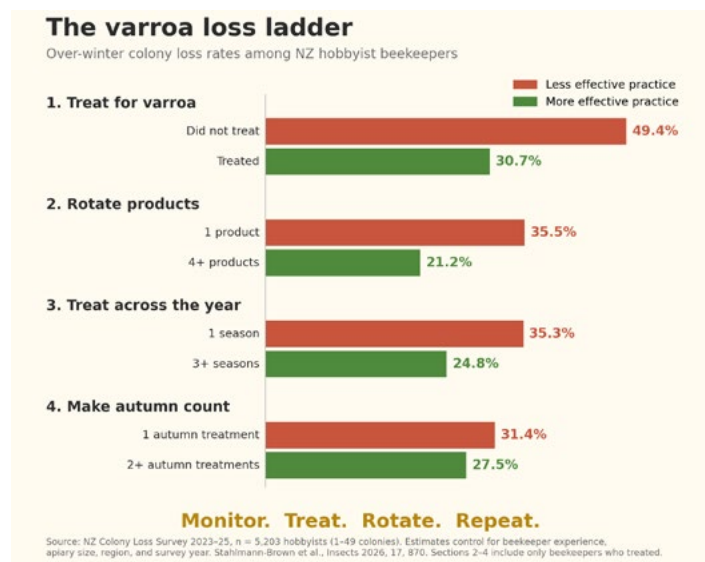
When we open our hives each spring, I am reminded that hobbyist beekeepers carry the heaviest burden of winter losses in New Zealand. The 2025 NZ Colony Loss Survey found that beekeepers with fewer than 50 colonies lost 33.4% of their colonies over winter, compared with 13.2% for beekeepers with 50–500 colonies and 13.0% for beekeepers with more than 500 colonies. In fact, hobbyist losses have exceeded commercial losses in all of the last seven surveys, and they attribute their losses to varroa more than any other cause.

When I presented results from the NZ Colony Loss Survey to the Wellington Beekeepers Association in spring 2024, a club member challenged me to turn the survey data into practical advice for beekeepers like her. The result is a paper recently published in the journal *Insects*, co-written with Ken Brown, Richard Hall, Frank Lindsay, Hayley Pragert, and Michelle Taylor.

We analysed responses from 5,203 hobbyist beekeepers who completed the NZ Colony Loss Survey in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Using multivariate regression methods, we compared winter losses across different varroa management practices while controlling for beekeeper experience, apiary size, region, and survey year. Few studies anywhere have put numbers on the benefits of varroa control in this way, and ours is the first to focus on New Zealand hobbyists. Here is what we found, and what it means in your apiary.

1. Treat. Hobbyists who did not treat for varroa lost 49.4% of their colonies over winter. Those who treated lost 30.7%. Treating is the single most important thing you can do as colonies will not simply overcome varroa on their own. This is especially true in New Zealand given our high hive density, which enables mites to move freely between apiaries.



Over-winter colony loss rates among New Zealand hobbyist beekeepers, 2023–2025.

Col Loss Survey Gets a Re-brand, but Should Land Soon

For the first time in 12 years, New Zealand's Colony Loss Survey will not be led by Bioeconomy Science Institute (formerly Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research Group) scientist Pike Stahlmann-Brown, with the Ministry for Primary Industries deciding to take the role "in-house".

Dr Fleur Francois, Biosecurity New Zealand director, diagnostics, readiness and surveillance says they expect to distribute the survey to beekeepers in the first half of October – over a month later than recent years – with it renamed the National Bee Health Survey. Francois says that key aspects of the previous Colony Loss Survey will be retained, to support long-term trend monitoring and benchmarking.

2. Rotate products. Among beekeepers who treated, losses fell steadily as the number of different products rose: 35.5% for one product, 30.6% for two, 27.3% for three, and 21.2% for four or more. Products work in different ways, so rotating them also reduces the risk of varroa developing resistance. Alternate treatment types, avoid relying on the same product year after year, and always follow the label.

3. Treat across the year. Beekeepers who treated in only one season (a season being 'spring', 'summer', 'autumn' or 'winter') lost 35.3% of their colonies. Those who treated in three or more seasons lost 24.8%. Varroa numbers rise and fall with brood, so control is an ongoing process rather than a one-off event.

4. Make autumn count. Mite loads peak just as colonies raise the long-lived winter bees that must carry them through to spring. Beekeepers who treated more than once in autumn lost 27.5% of colonies, compared with 31.4% for those who treated once. Start early, because damage done to developing winter bees by mites and the viruses they spread cannot be undone later. And change products rather than repeating the same one.

5. Experience is no substitute for good management. Beekeepers with more than five years' experience did not have significantly lower losses than newer beekeepers. Winter losses are not just a beginner's problem. No two seasons are alike: weather, forage, reinvasion from collapsing colonies nearby, and mite levels all change. What worked last year may not be enough this year.

6. Monitor, don't guess. About one in five hobbyists did no formal varroa monitoring. Deformed wings, crawling bees, and mites visible on adult bees are late signs of varroa infestation, and they often appear only after treatment can no longer save the colony. A wash with alcohol or soapy water tells you far more than a visual check, and sacrificing a sample of bees is far better than losing a colony.

A word on the evidence. Our data come from a survey, so they show correlations rather than proof of cause and effect. The NZ Colony Loss Survey is comprehensive and is answered by a large number of beekeepers, with between 29% and 43% of all registered New Zealand beekeepers taking part. The differences we found are large, and they persist after accounting for beekeeper experience, apiary size, region, and survey year. Most also held when we looked only at beekeepers who did no formal monitoring and so could not have been treating in response to monitoring results. Our results are consistent with results from field trials overseas (e.g. Kulhanek et al. 2021).

Hobbyists lose colonies at two and a half times the commercial rate, but our results suggest that relatively modest changes can make a substantial difference. This spring, plan which products you will rotate through the year, and pencil in two autumn treatments, and monitor before and after treatment to make sure it worked.

The bottom line fits on a hive lid: **Monitor. Treat. Rotate. Repeat.**

Read the full article: Stahlmann-Brown et al. (2026). Varroa and Colony Losses: Practical Advice for Hobbyist Beekeepers. *Insects* 17(8), 870. <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4450/17/8/870> 🐝

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Rock-tober 2026



Last year Aimz rocked into her beekeeping work in October and now, with expert timing, she's at it again, bopping away in the Bay of Plenty...

It's the end of the world as we know it – and I feel fine. With pollination just a shot away, it's time to rock around the clock. For what it's worth, welcome to another Rock-tober special.

Imagine there's no heaven. Only kiwifruit orchards, netting forever. Row after row after identical row. Low hanging canopies, jutting pergolas, spray schedules and strategically hidden drainage, with orchard staff lurking somewhere in the gloom.

So, you think you can tell heaven from hell? Paint it black and dance to the beat of the living dead. Throw in a few million bees for good measure, then you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile and you may ask yourself, how did I get here?

Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy. Tune in, there's plenty of work to be done. Good music equals good vibrations.

Navigating these narrow strips in the deep purple of night requires big balls (metaphorically speaking). Pre-requisites include a good memory, a map, strong lights and a bright crew. A raincoat for when it's wet, wet, wet and you need a bit of shelter from the storm. Yes, the show must go on, even if you have to take the weather with you.

Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy? You're in the jungle baby, you've got to roll with the punches. You don't have to put on the red light, but it sure does keep the bees calmer when loading or unloading.

At some point, when it's getting near dawn and mates close their tired eyes, you'll be thinking there must be some kind of way out of here. Running over the same old ground, what have we found? Someone's parked a vehicle in the way.

Wouldn't it be nice if everything was simple. Daytime orientation gives clarity, but things don't always go to plan. You can't always get what you want, but if you keep a level head you just might find you get what you need...

But we are not quite there yet. Pollination really kicks in around labour weekend. Labour weekend – I get it, ha-ha.

Splitting hives is our start, necessary to increase numbers and prevent swarming. Strong hives with new queens entering orchards, gives growers the best chance to achieve pollination rates.

Spotting queens is a full-time job. With the cool wind in my hair, I get on my knees and pray that I will find her on the first frame. Dream on. Sometimes they are, but sometimes they hear us coming, our searches futile because she is hiding in the feeder. Or there she goes, over the side, – come on girl, don't fear the reaper.

The work is picking up, life as a beekeeper is about to get stone cold crazy. Running on adrenaline is more than a feeling, it's a real buzz. Do you feel like I do?

The times they are a changing. Time to kiss those sweet children of mine, for I hate to wake them up to say goodbye. Time to catch up with some mates – they say I'm crazy, but I have a good time, and most importantly time to accumulate some sleep, before I'm so tired I could cry.

Prepare yourselves fellow beeks. Eat well, stay cheery.

Dream until your dreams come true and I'll see you on the Darkside of the moon.

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. 🐝



From the Darkside of the moon to the Bay of Plenty, Aimz is rocking into October low on time and on the run around the beehives.

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Fixing the Public Service



Last month vastly-experienced top bureaucrat Ian Fletcher took aim at **Accountability in the Public Sector**. This month that thought process continues with a diagnosis of the public sector's overriding ills and a remedy that might compromise some political neutrality amongst sector leaders, but will raise much-needed competence and accountability.

BY IAN FLETCHER

One of the curiosities of the current election campaign is that there is a surprising degree of consensus that the public service isn't working well, and something needs to be done. New Zealand isn't alone in this – the new government in the UK is pursuing radical decentralisation of the government. The Elon Musk-led DOGE slash-and-burn binge at the start of the second Trump administration in the US reflected the sense that the system was bloated and should be radically cut. Even the staid EU administration is in (relative) turmoil over the proposal to abolish the semi-independent EU foreign service and merge it into the European Commission, because it has been judged ineffective.

Here, the National Party wants a further radical reduction in the public service, claiming (frankly implausibly) that AI can replace officials. The word on the Wellington street is that the real reason is a lively fear that the country's credit rating is at risk if spending isn't cut. This is an easy sacrifice compared to many other programmes.

And the sense that something must be done has been heightened by the recent scandals around the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment's (MBIE) immigration system, and the management of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). In both cases, senior officials have behaved badly, and

seem to have got away with it. I've checked, and the rules in the Cabinet manual actually aren't clear (they jolly well should be) but there's no excuse for actual deceit of either the Minister or of Parliament. My view is that the Public Service Commissioner should have summarily removed both the relevant chief executives on the simple basis that if you take the big bucks, you carry the can. No excuses.

But this leads to the wider question, what is to be done? Like the UK, our public service is over-centralised (and local authorities are infantilised and starved of money). Like the US, there's widespread belief that the system is bloated and self-serving (and the FENZ and MBIE stories seem to confirm that). Like the EU, we have a system that is fragmented and incoherent: every department hires its own staff, and too many organisations are run independently, and so miss out on the sort of coordination that should make a smaller country work better.

Three observations, and a couple of revolutionary, but not-that-radical, suggestions.

FIRSTLY: HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

Human societies have been inventing public services for thousands of years, literally in every great civilisation. Some were based on internal competition (the Roman *cursus honorum*). Others used examinations and a rigid internal structure, with a clear focus on a narrow but important set of questions (China). Some used religion as the organising principle (ancient Egypt; the more modern Papacy). Some aspired to intellectual virtuosity and ethical high-mindedness (the Indian Civil Service, and its post-independence successor, the Indian Administrative Service). The story goes on. New Zealand faces a more benign environment than any of these; we should be able to get it right.

SECOND POINT: THE PUBLIC SERVICE ISN'T LIKE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Attempts to manage the civil service as if it was a company won't work. There are good reasons for this. A successful company aims for efficiency: maximising output or revenue and minimising costs. The public service deals with permanent ambiguity: managing competing and conflicting demands that just can't be reconciled,



Ian Fletcher oversaw a 40 percent head count reduction while working for the Queensland government and says staff cuts in the public sector can be possible if competent managers are left to work through the process, but you will not get 'more for less' as a result.



and must be managed. Lower taxes and higher health spending are a simple example. Both are good ideas; success means holding them in tension.

AND FINALLY...

The public service has one employer but many different types of task. The people who run the passport system need different skills to those running the debt management office or the road system, or the Work and Income NZ system, or the courts. The whole system needs to be able to think in detail about complex skills and deployment, as well as see the big picture. Simple answers don't work, and any politician who claims that there are single solutions to the challenge of making public services work is just wrong.

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

Firstly, make it easier to sack the bosses. Do what Australian governments do and put senior managers on contracts with fewer rights. High pay and lots of respect, but matched by clear 'down the road' accountability when things go wrong, or the political wind changes. We also need more of a revolving door, so senior officials leave government, go and actually do and learn things, and maybe come back. There's a lot wrong with the US system, but they get this bit right.

Secondly, recognise that real competence is better than politically-neutral incompetence and groupthink (which is what we have now). The original idea of a politically neutral, professional

'civil service' came as an antidote to nineteenth century British governments than combined political favours with laziness and incompetence. It was a great idea at the time. But here in New Zealand, we now have chief executives and others roosting for years in protected roles, with limited skills and no appetite for risk or innovation. We need to think whether we would be better off with a public service that is more political, but also more competent and interested in actually making things better.

And let management manage. If budget pressures mean the public service needs to be cut, let's do it. But let's not hide behind AI, and let's not imagine the 'efficiency' means you can always get more from less. That's fantasy. Make clear what money is available and what the actual priorities are, and let the system work. I ran the Queensland precursor to MBIE and reduced headcount 40 per cent in two years with no fuss, because I was left alone to do it – I was lucky that my Ministers had other priorities.

Finally, don't settle for second best. Let's make clear to anyone who will listen that New Zealand deserves really great government. We don't have it now, but we could. And it saddens me that we tolerate venal incompetence.

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

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