



Beekeeper's Saviour Gavin Smith

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Presidents Report

Vincent Schnyder, ABA President

Dear Members,

As we near the end of our 23/24 Membership year. Reflecting on the past months, I think all agree that this was one of the more challenging years for so many of us. First in mind are all those members who lost their bees as part of the attempt to eradicate Varroa and I think all us who love their bees can feel what these members went through.

Additionally, navigating through the ever-changing landscape of rules and regulations, compounded by new emergency orders and control measures, has been demanding. Keeping abreast of the latest requirements has posed challenges, and I understand the temptation some may feel to simply ignore them. However, with the recent withdrawal of the control order, beekeepers can now make decisions regarding Varroa management tailored to their specific circumstances.

In support of this transition, Varroa workshops have been and are being conducted in various locations. If you haven't had the opportunity to attend one of these workshops, I strongly encourage you to do

so. This training initiative is being implemented nationwide, with dedicated Varroa Development Officers (VDOs) offering assistance to both commercial and recreational beekeepers.

While significant efforts are being made to enhance the skills of all beekeepers, it's important to recognize that we may encounter some trial and error along the way. Sharing successes and failures within your local beekeeping club will be crucial. Whether you're a seasoned beekeeper or just starting out, managing Varroa puts us all on a similar learning curve. Therefore, collaboration within our community will be paramount to our collective success ■

Happy beekeeping



QR Code Hive Reports

By Drew Maywald GCRB

The Gold Coast Regional Beekeepers have adopted the latest technology to keep accurate records of the club's apiary of five hives. On each hive we have affixed a QR code, so that any member doing a hive inspection can simply scan the QR code on the hive with their phone's camera or QR Code App. One of the QR codes on the brood box is illustrated below:

The hive inspection report form displayed can then be completed on the member's phone. We have made the report form as concise as possible so that most responses are a one word answer or entail selecting an option. You can check out the online report form by scanning the QR code below:



Scan QR Code to view survey

When the member has completed the form they simply touch submit at the end of the form. The responses then automatically populate a spreadsheet in Google Docs so that we have a permanent electronic record of every hive report.

When we know what protocols we are going to need to follow when Varroa gets here we will add a third section to the form to cover what Varroa strategies and treatments are done on each hive.

We are also using a QR code as an incentive for members to sign in to any GCRB meetings or events, and every sign in gives the member a ticket in the draw for 6 Christmas hams at the end of the year ■





Amateur Beekeepers Australia

Better apiculture through knowledge

Membership 2024/25

The 2023/24 membership year is soon coming to a close and in early June you will receive an email from our membership system with a link to renew your affiliated club and ABA membership.

Early-Bird Discount in June 2024

Members who renew their membership in June 2024 will receive a discount of \$ 5 on their ABA membership and pay only \$20 instead of \$25 ABA fee to reward their loyalty to our association.

This discount is only available in June and members who renew between July and September will be charged the full ABA fee of \$25.

ABA and/or Club Life Members

The ABA currently has 15 Life Members and there are 31 club Life Members. Where a membership fee is due, we will contact these members individually to inform them about the renewal process and how to purchase the optional Public and Product Liability Insurance.

Members of more than one Affiliated Club

If you are a member of more than one affiliated club, the membership system will invite you to renew each membership individually and include the ABA fee each time. Unfortunately we could not avoid the double charging of the ABA fee, however, we have established a process to refund any duplicate ABA fees. We aim to process the refunds within two to three weeks.

Insurance

The Public and Product Liability Insurance can be added at the check-out page as an optional extra. The policy runs from 30 June 2024 till 30 June 2025 4pm and the insurance premium has been set by our insurer at \$25 in line with the premium increase of the overall policy. For further information click on [this link](#).

Logbook

We received feedback from several members that they don't use the ABA Logbook which was part of the Membership Pack for the last few years and that the logbooks would go to waste.

As more and more members use apps or different means to record their hive inspections, we decided to cease sending automatically log books to all members.

However, logbooks are still available, either through the [Shop](#) or even easier (and cheaper) as part of the renewal process.

At the checkout page, you can choose if you want the

Swarm Collector Register

The Swarm system has been rebuilt and all members can now opt-in / opt-out from being listed. For further details with a detailed guide on how to get listed and adjust your swarm message click on [this link](#).

Questions?

For any questions in relation to the renewal process, please contact first your club membership officer as stated on your renewal notice.

Public Liability for Amateur Beekeepers



Public Liability cover for amateur beekeepers has been arranged and designed by Aon based on the number of hives you keep and provides you with cover in case a third party sues you for injury or property damage done to them by your bees, or from the products you sold.

Please note that an amateur beekeeper is deemed by the insurer to be an individual with less than 100 Hives. This cover is not designed for commercial beekeeping operations.

Limits Provided:



**Public
Liability:**
\$30,000,000
per occurrence



**Product
Liability:**
\$30,000,000
per period of
insurance



Excess
\$500
per claim

Contact Us

Get covered today. For more information please visit:

www.beekeepers.asn.au/insurance





Covered Activities Include:

- Maintenance of one or more apiary sites with bee hives
- Assemble & build beekeeping equipment
- Work on bee hives
- Moving beehives
- Collecting bee swarms and established colonies. The collection of swarms and established colonies must be a community service and not a commercial undertaking and incidental to the members usual beekeeping
- Extract, bottle or pack honey and honey products
- Sell honey and honey products
- Sell beekeeping equipment
- Attend markets and shows

Please note the following:

- Liabilities arising from any damage made / caused by the beekeeper to gain access to bees such as in swarm collection **are not included**.

Apiarian/Bee Products

Covered Include:

Apiarian products include the production, distribution & sale of the following of:

- Liquid honey
- Creamed honey
- Candied honey
- Creamed or liquid honey with up to 8% natural fruit/plant flavouring
- Pollen
- Queen bees
- Bee colonies
- Honeycomb and chunk honey
- Bees wax and candles
- Bees wax wraps
- Bees wax furniture polish

Please note that covered Apiarian/Bee Products do not include:

- Royal Jelly
- Honey based beverages including mead
- Lip balm & all other cosmetics
- Creamed or liquid honey with more than 8% single natural fruit/single natural plant flavouring
- Creamed or liquid honey containing nuts

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The information contained in this flyer is general in nature and should not be relied on as advice (personal or otherwise) because your personal needs, objectives and financial situation have not been considered. Before deciding whether a product is right for you, please consider the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (if applicable) and full policy terms and conditions available from Aon on request. All representations in this communication in relation to the insurance products we arrange are subject to the full terms and conditions of the relevant policy. Please contact us if you have any queries.

Biosecurity Buzz

Mike Allerton ABA Biosecurity Officer



National Varroa Response Strategy Workshop

The ABA was invited to participate in a one-day workshop to shape the direction and priorities for Varroa research. I volunteered to represent the ABA as the only non-commercial beekeeping organisation to attend.

There were representatives from government, AHBIC and various bee keeping bodies including pollinators, honey producers and queen breeders.

Quite a few research scientists also participated from the Australian National University, University of Sydney, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, La Trobe University, Elizabeth McArthur Institute and Southern Cross University.

Agrifutures Honey Bee & Pollination commissioned a study by a group of our scientists including Michael J. Holmes – *University of Sydney*, Jody Gerdts – *La Trobe University*, Julia Grassl – *DPI*, Alexander S. Mikeheyev – *Australian National University*, Mohn M. K. Roberts – *CSIRO*, Emily Remnant – *University of Sydney* and Nadine C. Chapman – *University of Sydney*.

The study involved a survey of 164 expert beekeepers and researchers from 22 countries. There were interviews with 21 Varroa experts including beekeepers, breeders and researchers. Finally, a review of the extensive body of information on Varroa was conducted to determine what is applicable to Australia.

The final document, *“Resilient beekeeping in the face of varroa”* is close to publication. Keep an eye out for the for this interesting read.

It was gratifying to see that the workshop is not purely an academic exercise. The inclusion of beekeepers and non-university researchers has given the study real world credibility, in my opinion.

One of the objectives of the workshop is to ensure that research is not duplicated, potentially wasting limited funds.

A second one day workshop was held for breeders and scientists to drill down on breeding priorities.

It appears to me that Australia will benefit from

the lessons of others and hit the road running in dealing with our latest biosecurity challenge.

Registration of treatment chemicals

Since last issue, there has been no progress with the APMVA registration of new Varroa treatment chemicals. The wheels turn slowly.

Read the article “Own Use Exemption” in this issue for details on the ABA push to adopt the New Zealand approach to Varroa management.

Nuc Aid

More enquiries are coming in from the red zone beekeepers wanting to re-establish their apiaries.

If you’d like to start beekeeping again, Email biosecurity@beekeepers.asn.au with your name, phone, suburb, ABA member number and hive brand. I’ll put you in touch with a Nuc Aid donor to work out the details. Read about one of our very generous donors in the article “Beekeeper’s Saviour”

AFB Minimisation Program

There was only one positive result in the last round of 14 samples tested for AFB by the lab. Another batch is ready for submission.

Club biosecurity officers email me to join the program. Each club can have three tests. Larger clubs can have more.

Varroa Workshops

Workshops were held throughout April with high rates of attendance. I saw many ABA club members at the two workshops that Bruce White, Torsten Engelhardt and I delivered. The feedback was very positive, even from the commercial beekeepers attending. Scheduling of more workshops across NSW are underway rolling out from June. Interstate workshops will be forthcoming. Don’t miss the opportunity attend this very informative free workshop.

Club Visits/Presentations

Guest speaker at your club meeting. Let me know if you’d like a presentation at one of your club nights. Does your membership have questions for the ABA? I’ll come to your meeting to answer all I can or bring them back to the committee for answers ■

Mike Allerton ~ biosecurity@beekeepers.asn.au

FUN FACTS: THE AMAZING NAVIGATION SKILLS OF HONEYBEES

Nikki Potgieter

Honeybees truly are a fascinating species – did you know that they have remarkable navigation skills?

In today's world, many of us struggle to find our way around without the use of Google Maps and our ever-present smart phones; yet honeybees, with brains the size of a sesame seed, are able to undertake complex navigational tasks every day.

As beekeepers, it is easy to take for granted how remarkable their skills are. How do they know where to find the best sources of nectar and pollen? After all, this changes on a daily basis. How do they communicate these locations with their hive-mates when they don't have maps and smartphones at their disposal? And how do they unerringly (most of the time) find their way back to their hive? Even when we put them in apiaries with multiple hives lined up next to each other.

So, let's explore some fun facts about honeybee navigation:

1. Sun Compass: Honeybees use the position of the sun in the sky as a reference point for navigation, a behaviour known as a sun compass. They can determine the direction they need to fly in relation to the sun to reach their food source. What is even more impressive is that honeybees can maintain this sense of direction even when the sun is not directly visible, such as on a cloudy day. They do this by detecting the polarization of light in the sky, which allows them to infer the sun's position. But what is truly remarkable, is that they are also able to account for the movement of the sun across the sky during the day.

2. Beeline Efficiency: The phrase "make a beeline for it" stems from the honeybee's ability to fly in a straight line to their destination.

When a foraging bee discovers a food source, it will usually return to its hive following the shortest possible route, a straight line. The beeline

strategy is not just about saving time, but also about conserving energy. Flying in a straight line reduces the amount of energy a bee needs to expend to get back to the hive. This is especially important considering that a bee's energy comes from the very nectar it is out collecting.

Bees can adapt their beeline if environmental factors change, such as an obstacle appearing along their route. They are quick learners and will adjust their flight path while still maintaining the efficiency of a straight line as much as possible.

3. Landmark Memory: Honeybees have a fantastic spatial memory and a sophisticated cognitive ability that plays a vital role in their foraging and communication behaviours. They use visual cues in their environment to navigate and can remember the locations of food sources and their hive. These visual cues or 'landmarks' can be any notable feature in their environment, including trees, flowers, and buildings.

Research has shown that honeybees don't just remember what the landmarks look like, but also how far they are from the hive or a food source. They use this 'distance estimation' to calculate how long they need to waggle during their waggle dance.

4. The Waggle Dance: Honeybees communicate the location of a food source to their hive mates through a unique movement known as the "waggle dance". The direction of the dance indicates the direction of the food source relative to the sun, and the duration of the dance indicates the distance.

But it gets even more interesting. Honeybees also account for the sun's movement throughout the day. This means that when a bee communicates the location of a food source to its hive mates, it is giving directions based on the current position of the sun. Even if the bee found the food source hours ago, it adjusts its dance to account for the sun's movement since that time. This allows

other bees to accurately find the food source even though the sun has moved in the sky.

5. Sensing Magnetic Fields: Some studies suggest that honeybees might sense the Earth's magnetic field to help them navigate. This exciting area of research could reveal even more about the honeybee's impressive navigational abilities, and while it's not entirely understood how this works, there are some interesting findings:

Magnetoreception: Honeybees, like several other animals, are believed to possess an ability known as magnetoreception, which allows them to detect magnetic fields. This magnetic sense could play a role in their impressive navigation skills.

Magnetite Crystals: Studies have found magnetite crystals in honeybees, particularly in their abdomen. Magnetite is a naturally magnetic mineral, and it is thought that these crystals could help a bee to sense the Earth's magnetic field.

Role in Navigation: The exact role of magnetic sensing in honeybee navigation is still being studied. Some research suggests that bees may use the Earth's magnetic field as a kind of backup navigational aid. For example, if other navigational cues (like the sun or landmarks) are not available, bees might rely more on their magnetic sense.

Magnetic Memory: There is also evidence to suggest that honeybees can remember changes in the magnetic field associated with a particular

location. This 'magnetic memory' might help them recognize familiar locations.

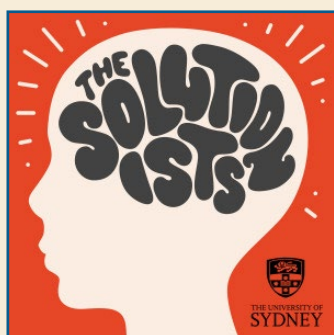
Impact of Human-made Magnetic Fields: Some research has shown that human-made electromagnetic fields can disrupt the honeybee's sense of direction, possibly by interfering with their magnetic sense. However, more research is needed to fully understand this impact.

6. Smell or olfaction: Smell or olfaction plays a crucial role in honeybee navigation. Honeybees have a keen sense of smell, which they use to locate flowers rich in nectar and pollen. Each type of flower emits its own scent that bees can detect from a distance.

Bees also use their sense of smell to navigate back to their hive. Each bee colony has a unique scent, which is a combination of odours from the queen, the bees' own scent glands and the materials within the hive. This unique scent signature helps a bee to distinguish its own hive when multiple hives are located in the same area.

So, as you can see, honeybees don't rely on just one method to navigate – by using a complex combination of visual, olfactory (smell), and possibly even magnetic cues to find their way, combined with fantastic memories, they are multi-sensory navigation superheroes.

Next time you observe your hive, take a moment to appreciate the amazing abilities of our tiny buzzing friends ■



SAVING NATURE'S UNSUNG HEROES – Why pollinator decline threatens life as we know it and how you can help.

Did you know that without flies, you wouldn't have chocolate? Or that if you went out into your backyard right now, you could probably find an insect that is new to science?

On *The Solutionists* with Mark Scott, entomologist Tanya Latty takes you inside the world of pollinators. Bees, beetles and butterflies are critical to life as we know it – but around the world, they're in trouble. "We're almost certainly losing species faster than we're naming them," Tanya says. So, what's driving global pollinator decline? What does it mean

for our food security? And what can you do to help? Listen to **University of Sydney's The Solutionists** <https://pod.f0/e/228ba5>, free wherever you get your podcasts ■



Gavin shows us the nuc boxes made by The Mens Sheds

Beekeeper's Saviour

Mike Allerton, ABA Biosecurity Officer

I first heard of Gavin Smith when he responded to NucAid last year with a generous offer to provide some nucs and bees for those beekeepers who lost their hives in the Varroa Eradication Program.

We recently met at the Waitara National Varroa Response Workshop and again at his bee club.

It turns out that Gavin has been coming to the rescue of beekeepers who've lost apiaries to disasters for years. More on that shortly.

Gavin first started in beekeeping with native bees. He managed *Tetragonula carbonaria* colonies, becoming quite the expert. He eventually added honey bees to the collection and applied his inquisitive mind to hone his *Apis mellifera* skills.

Not content with the usual Langstroth hive equipment, Gavin was a very early adopter and innovator of the Warre hive. He is often consulted on making Warre equipment and the tips and tricks to keeping bees in them.

He's a member of the Sydney Bee club and is a founding member of the Inner West Beekeepers club homed at the Magpie Sports Club, Croydon Park.

When I met with Gavin, he was busy in the club apiary which is perfectly hidden behind some

structures at the rear of the sports club. I'm sure most of the football fans have no clue to the bees going about their business so close to the action on the field.

The apiary has several storage sheds for the bee keeping equipment. A short walk along the sheds and past a huge water tank is a diverse range of hives.

There's a few Langstroth hives of course. The Warre stands out, with Top bars, Long Langs and a Flow Hive filling out the collection.

Then there's the possum box that had fallen from its perch under the weight of the bees within. The colony had suffered comb damage, brood loss, crushed bees and potentially lost the queen under the impact of the fall.

Gavin has it at the apiary to assess the likelihood of survival. If all goes well, he'll rehouse the colony into a new hive to recover.

Gavin's "saviour" work began when a commercial beekeeper he knew was caught in the bushfires losing his hives and his livelihood.

Gavin designed a nuc box that could be made from sheet plywood with minimal waste. His design produces two nucs per sheet.

He secured a grant to proceed with his mission to help beekeepers like his friend get back on their feet.



Gavin salvaging a colony in a Possum box

He engaged enthusiastic woodworkers at various Men's Sheds to make the nucs.

The kind hearted members of the Inner West Beekeepers started filling the nucs with splits and building them up.

The bushfire affected beekeepers were soon on the road to recovery. A long hard road made shorter and smoother with Gavin Smith's huge heart, vision, organising skills and his talented team of hard-working woodworkers and beekeepers.

Then the floods came, washing apiaries down rivers, scattering hives far and wide. Distraught beekeepers not knowing where to turn.

Gavin's polished operation sprang into action once again. Nuc box production ramped up at multiple Men's Sheds. The beekeepers ramping up colony production, splitting any hive they could to fill those nucs.

Yet again the road to recovery smoothed over by a wonderful team of kind hearted souls doing what they can to help those in distress.

When NucAid was launched in October last year with a request to you all, that if you could, please make an extra split this season. It could help out the Hunter Valley and Central Coast clubs get back up and running next season.

The response was overwhelming with members from all over pledging to do splits or donate complete hives. Many were ready to supply straight away.

It was far too soon at the time. Mite loads were extreme and there was still much to learn before

either club could risk bringing in healthy hives to certain mite infestation.

Now, with the transition to management, Varroa education and encouragement from DPI to get bees again, things are finally on the move.

Hunter Valley and Central Coast clubs have started rebuilding their club apiaries and individual members are taking the plunge too.

Some members have started already, and others will wait until spring.

Gavin has already provided a stack of nucleus colonies and nuc boxes to the Central Coast Club allowing them to re-establish their apiary. They can now produce their own splits to build up even faster.

If you get the chance, drop by the Inner West Club at the Magpie Sports Club, Croydon Park for an interesting and very entertaining chat with Gavin over a cold beer ■



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Getting to know your Varroa

Rod Bourke, Bee Biosecurity NBBP

Once it was established that there really was Varroa destructor present in NSW most beekeepers immediately experienced great anxiety, and this has affected many operators in many different ways. Some have already decided that it is going to be too hard and are getting out. Generally speaking, for good beekeepers varroa is just another thing to manage, but it can be “the straw that broke the camel’s back” for some that only undertake minimal hive management and run less productive and often unhealthy beekeeping operations.

Wherever varroa has arrived around the world there has always been upheaval within the established commercial industry and recreational beekeepers, with some leaving (out of fear, financial failure or for good reason such as accelerated retirement), whilst others either added staff or reduce hive numbers per beekeeper to reflect an increased workload per hive, whilst

others even expanded their operational size (and put on lots of additional staff). Every operator has different business opportunities and risks, so the choices they make will always be different.

I met beekeepers in New Zealand that had left the industry when varroa first spread as they were very anxious about its potentially devastating effects, and then re-entered some years later when they realised that they could still run a good viable bee operation. They were good beekeepers and this was basically just another layer of management and they learned how to incorporate that into their operation.

I also heard about others running too many hives that were completely wiped out. They never made serious attempts to monitor and manage their varroa, nor keep on top of their already established and ongoing American foulbrood and other hive health and consistency issues, so their bees faltered and they went out of business very quickly.

The very first live Varroa I saw in NZ was in an intentionally unmanaged hive. This was after 1 week of hive inspections seeing nothing in well managed commercial hives, showing that you can

manage mites and continue to have good bees.

Whilst small hive beetle and AFB have been particularly devastating for some, the arrival of varroa (deemed the most significant pest of honeybees worldwide) immediately raised some very pertinent questions for those invested in the industry, such as;

- When will my bees get it?
- What if they already have it?
- Where will I find the money to treat my hives?
- Will my bees (and my operation) survive?

The answers to those questions will be different for everybody, as will be the options to solve the problems that arise. Probably the best points to consider and think about are ones such as;

- If you are close to or already past “retirement age” as a beekeeper then you may want to consider downsizing.
- If your hives suffer ongoing AFB and other hive health and consistency issues then consider assistance from your Varroa Development Officer (VDO). VDO’s help you to look at your current processes and see where they need to be modified or improved, and offer advice to reduce AFB plus improve overall hive management.
- You will likely need to accept the fact that in order to improve your hive survival you will need to change some of your old ways and will need additional training. Some people find the need to change very challenging, but it can be done and the rewards are great.
- Varroa has put an end to the “Good old days”, so to survive and prosper YOU also need to change the way you bee keep! If you don’t want to change then do every other beekeeper around you a favour and look at your exit strategy. I know that will be a bitter pill for some to swallow, but at times like this the last thing that anybody needs is a grub around them causing additional pest and disease problems that cost everybody else more money to control.

Don’t rely on spotting mites on uncapped drones to determine when to treat. The best standards are alcohol wash, soapy water wash or sugar shaking to determine your mite thresholds and the need to



treat. Prevent high mite loads by treating earlier rather than later, as bee health suffers otherwise.

I myself first saw varroa mites within some of my own bee colonies in March 2023, which was a strange feeling but also one that actually lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. For the previous 8 months I had found heaps of mites in other people’s hives, but not a single one in my own (and yes, I was looking/washing), so it was good to eventually get some varroa runs on the board. These hives had been sitting just 300 meters out of a red zone since August 2022, so there was a long-standing acceptance on my part that they would get varroa at some point (it’s inevitable when bees have wings and can easily fly long distances).

In December 2022, the apiary site entered the very outside edge of another red zone and DPI surveillance sticky mats and miticide strips all came back negative for varroa presence. Yet, less than 15 weeks later in mid-March one hive registered 9 mites in an alcohol wash (3% infestation) whilst the rest were clear.

The very first thing that I reflected upon was this new opportunity to “experiment” with managing varroa within my own hives (as you do). The second thing was “Oh no, now I have mites and I need to notify DPI about that and they will then be knocked on the head”. That apiary was scheduled for euthanasia, but due to a merit-based proposal I was able to get permission to undertake some further tests on the apiary prior to the upcoming euthanasia date.

Arriving at a point where I now actually had mites myself did clear away the uncertainty about what would happen when I “get mites”. Now that they are on the move across NSW in 2024, I know many other beekeepers are also being “unburdened” of that long standing dread/fear and are instead learning how to deal with mites too. As the Emergency Orders tapered to less onerous Control Orders, I have personally found it quite calming to transition to beekeeping where it is clearly understood that it is my responsibility (and need) to manage varroa, as opposed to the situation that it had been earlier in the eradication response when fear of hive euthanasia was still ongoing.

Five weeks after my initial Varroa detection, all hives had a sticky mat placed in and given 2 days for measure natural mite fall. The only mat that returned a positive for mites was that same infested hive, with 12 varroa mites on it (dropping 6 mites/day).

Hives were then alcohol washed and all were clear except for that one positive hive, which now had 56 mites (16% infestation). That infested hive was also going backwards at a significant rate and did not look nearly as healthy nor as strong as it previously had 5 weeks prior. Bee population decline mixed with increasing mite pressure is a deadly combination, as that is more mites feeding on bees each day, making for more weakened bees within a colony.

From the 2-day natural mite drop experiment it was clear that it is faster, more effective and accurate to determine mite numbers within a colony simply by alcohol washing (or soapy water wash or sugar shake) rather than trying to measure natural mite drop. Natural mite drop will often be minimal/hard to see in a colony until mite numbers are already quite high (and the established mite population is aging and dying at a faster rate) and would already have been detectable by alcohol wash many weeks and months prior. Therefore, at this point (during the varroa establishment phase where numbers are highly variable) and to make best use of your limited time just alcohol wash the required number of hives per apiary to determine your mite loads.

All hives then had miticide strips added and new sticky mats placed and left for five days. The hive with 16% infestation dropped 2,400 mites

during that time, and when that sticky mat came out another alcohol wash registered 9 mites (3% infestation). Even after a short treatment time of 5 days the miticide strips were already showing great effectiveness at knocking down and controlling phoretic and hatching mites. Please note that normally synthetic miticide strip treatments would be kept within a hive for 6-10 weeks depending on the product, so please read the product label carefully and follow the directions without deviating from them.

The other hives in that apiary all contained low levels of mites (between 8-13 mites per mat), such low numbers are not likely to be detected with alcohol washing. These numbers suggest there were less than 50-150 mites within each of these colonies as there was another 9-10 days of untreated capped worker brood (plus additional days of drones) still to hatch out. Only when they hatch and expose their hidden mites (to lethal miticides) can they be killed and then drop onto the sticky mat, which is why you always read the label and leave whichever products you use in for the correct duration of treatment time. I will continue to emphasise this point (always read the label) as it is very important that beekeepers read the label on each different miticide product they put into their hives.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing eradication response the hives had to be euthanised and wrapped the next evening, so the project could not be continued further to demonstrate the level of effectiveness that would have been achieved over a full control period (8-weeks). But, had I been able to run the treatments longer and conducted another alcohol wash a few weeks later it would have likely returned a clean wash or at the most only 1-2 mites in the wash (newly reinvaded mites from the environment not yet killed by miticide). As infested brood hatches, the miticides control (kill) them, so once all the old brood (worker and drone) hatches out the number of mites within a long-term strip-treated colony really falls away, which is the ongoing cycle for managing mites going forward.

What this very quick trial demonstrated was;

- the level of varroa infestation can vary greatly between hives within and next to each other in the same apiary



- an adequate number of hives need to be washed to obtain a reasonable idea of overall apiary infestation
- the hive infestation rate (% mites/100 bees) can increase very quickly once they are found at detectable levels (one hive went up from 3% to 16% infestation in just 5 weeks).
- even without the debilitating viruses (deformed wing and slow bee paralysis virus) the health of affected hives can start to deteriorate quite quickly as varroa numbers do increase, because they are feeding on bees and causing life shortening damage to each one that is fed upon.
- properly administered miticide treatments can start controlling mite numbers quite quickly (but need to be followed as per the label to achieve a proper result).
- an improvement in declining bee health (caused by previously high mite numbers) may take considerably longer to achieve than killing the varroa, so don't wait until your bees are in the ditch before treating them.

Drone removal is an effective way of reducing mite breeding rates if done properly, and may prove economical for commercial beekeepers who are trying to reduce use of other miticides. Note that you would do this as well as use other methods through the season, not rely on it solely.

The hive pictured above was treated with Formic Pro at Tocal this March. This is one of just a few products that can be used to treat mites whilst honey is on the hive. As with any miticide please

first read the label, PPE and usage instructions thoroughly and pay particular attention to hive ventilation and max-min temperature requirements before using it.

Prevention is better than a cure, so if you are already finding varroa mite in your hives please keep monitoring regularly and treat when you must. If you have found below treatment threshold mite numbers then don't wait another 16 weeks to check them again (as per ongoing control orders have stipulated as a maximum time between monitoring), instead check some other hives in the same apiary on your very next visit (eg. 10-21 days later) and also recheck the individual hives that gave you the highest readings on your previous visit. Now that varroa is here it will be the beekeeper's responsibility to manage it, so get prepared and start learning about what will need to be done.

The main point to consider here is that at some point over the next few years most colonies of bees (managed, unmanaged and feral) within NSW will contain mites, so managing them will become essential to those wanting to keep healthy, productive colonies. If you want to be a good beekeeper and maintain a strong, profitable business then make sure that you are doing your varroa monitoring frequently, not just every 16 weeks or so ■

As part of this the BEE PEST BLITZ continues to look at varroa management this year, so check it out at <https://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/beepestblitz/>



RECIPE SALTED HONEY PIE

Similar to a cheese cake this sweet buttery salty honey custard pie is too good to leave, its supposed to serve eight but I think it serves one. Best served with a dollop of crème.

INGREDIENTS

Crust

- 1 1/4 cups plain flour
- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup cold unsalted butter, cubed
- 2-3 tbsp. cold water

Filling

- 1 cup honey
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp white flour
- 2 tbsp cornmeal
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 4 large eggs
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 tbsp white vinegar

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the crust:

1. Mix flour, honey, and salt in a food processor until combined. Add butter, and pulse until texture is similar to sand.
2. With processor running, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time until dough just begins to clump together. On a floured surface knead dough until it comes together, form a disk wrap in cling wrap and rest for 30 mins in the fridge.
3. Roll dough out and place in a 20cm pie pan or dish and freeze.

4. Prepare the filling: Whisk together honey, butter, sugar, flour, cornmeal, and salt in a large bowl until combined. Add eggs, whisking until smooth. Add cream and vinegar, whisking until combined. Pour Filling into frozen Crust.

Bake :

1. Bake in 180c preheated oven until edges are firm and centre jiggles slightly, 45 to 55 minutes.
2. Let cool to room temperature on a wire rack, sprinkle extra sea salt on top ■

Secretary position now vacant please help.

We are looking for somebody to take over the secretary position until the AGM and maybe beyond if you're interested please contact secretary@beekeepers.asn.au

Fancy yourself as a quiz master ?

We need a coordinator for the next Colonel Pulling competition at the ABA AGM on 2nd November in Mittagong. All quizzzy people please apply to secretary@beekeepers.asn.au



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FIJI FIELD TRIP

Sat 27 July - Sat 3 Aug 2024
Lautoka Tanoa Waterfront Hotel

Escape the winter while your bees are quiet to join us for a field trip to Fiji. Come meet the industry professionals and learn what the Pacific Islanders do with beekeeping in an exciting timetable of activities we have arranged for you.

TRIP SCHEDULE

Date	Agenda
Sat 27/7	Arrival
Sun 28/7	Free day at the Resort
Mon 29/7	Morning HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE IN FIJI , <i>Retired Chair of Fijian Agriculture. Sant Kumar.</i> BEEKEEPING DEVELOPMENT IN FIJI , <i>John Caldiera , Apimondia Oceania Representative</i> How beekeepers worked with Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture, Biosecurity Authority, and overseas partners during the past 30 years to develop beekeeping. Afternoon THE HONEY & POLLINATION INDUSTRY IN FIJI TONGAN BEEKEEPING , <i>Bruce White OAM</i>
Tues 30/7	PESTS IN FIJI AND HOW THEY DEAL WITH THEM FIELD TRIP to Tina Thompson's Farm and Abdul Shafiq's large enterprise field trips
Wed 31/7	FIELD TRIP to Export fruit from Fiji to around the world, Indian Museum in Suva plus other attractions.

Costs: A\$900 per person, including accomodation (7 nights twin-share) incl. breakfast, conference, lunch on conference days and field trips. Return flight approx \$650.

For further information contact Lamorna Osborne lmosborne13@gmail.com

Own Use Exemption - Oxalic Acid and Formic Acid Varroa Treatments

Mike Allerton, ABA Biosecurity Officer

In my discussions and visits with clubs, and at the National Varroa Response Workshops there has been a single question emerging. “What about oxalic acid?”

Many of us know from our own research that it is probably the most used product throughout the world for Varroa control.

We have two oxalic acid products currently undergoing the registration process with the APMVA. There is no indication of how long product registration will take, or if it will be rejected.

There is data from overseas suggesting that the labelled dosage and delivery methods are not the most efficacious. Changing the label to suit updated information is a slow, expensive process. It would be a shame if the APMVA registered the products with outdated information.

I recently talked with Randy Oliver, California based commercial beekeeper and research scientist about his oxalic acid experiments.

Randy has found more effective dosages and delivery mediums than those stated on the USA labels. He commented on how difficult it is to update the label, and that Australia would likely experience the same problem.

He also noted that New Zealand legislated a way for beekeepers to overcome the slow response of the registration process.

Several ABA clubs have raised the matter as well. To that end, I have looked into the New Zealand “Own Use Exemption”. It looks to me to be an evolved way to allow beekeepers to experiment with recipes and products to find the best way to treat their own hives without breaking the law.

A key part of the exemption, is that the beekeeper can only use the product on their own hives, not sell it to others.

Such an exemption clause may open the possibility to greater choice in essential oils for those of us that prefer that path.

Not everyone will want to make their own treatments, choosing to stay with the registered products. It’s about allowing adults to make their own choices.

The ABA committee agreed that this is a logical and sensible approach that has served New Zealand beekeepers for years.

Such an exemption here would require a change in legislation by the federal government.

On the 22nd of April, I sent the following letter on behalf of the ABA to Senator the Hon. Murray Watt, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry requesting he consider the adoption of the NZ model in our legislation.

I also sent copies to the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council of which the ABA is a member, and to the Hon. Tara Moriarty, Member of the Legislative Council, Minister for Agriculture NSW.

While I was participating in the National Varroa Strategy Workshop in Canberra recently, I clearly placed our proposal on the table.

If we don’t receive a response from our federal representative in a reasonable time, say by the next issue of The Amateur Beekeeper (TAB), we’ll raise it to the next level.

There are two options to consider and perhaps you can think of others.

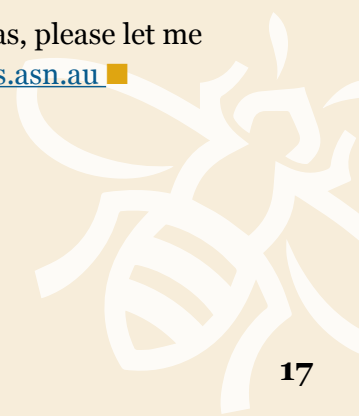
One, is to start a petition to collect signatures from beekeepers and the general public nationwide.

Two, is to include template letters in the next TAB promoting the exemption clause model to your local federal representative and to Senator Watt.

I’m attending Apiarist’s Association conferences in NSW, VIC, QLD and WA in the coming weeks and intend to lobby for support from whomever I can.

Please read through the following copy of the letter and the included NZ Clause.

If you have any questions or ideas, please let me know at biosecurity@beekeepers.asn.au ■





Senator the Hon. Murray Watt
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Own Use Exemption – Oxalic Acid and Formic Acid Varroa Treatments

Dear Senator the Hon. Murray Watt,

Amateur Beekeepers Australia (ABA) represents over 3,500 recreational beekeepers across multiple states and territories with membership continually growing. One of our missions is to promote better beekeeping practices through education.

The ABA continues to be supportive of the national Varroa response including the Varroa Management Training Workshops. Several of our members are engaged as contract trainers to deliver the workshops throughout NSW.

There have been many enquiries from members at the workshops and at club meetings about Varroa treatment options not yet registered with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), but commonly used elsewhere. Specifically, members are investigating various delivery methods and recipes for oxalic acid and formic acid treatments.

It is the ABA's policy to promote only legal treatments and to provide educational materials and demonstrations in their correct and safe use.

We are concerned that some members have made off the record statements that they intend to pursue some of the unregistered treatment options illegally. This presents a risk to beekeeper safety and food standards integrity through unsafe and misinformed practices. We want to help mitigate such risks, but our previously stated educational policy prevents us from providing the necessary education.

We refer to the New Zealand Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997 (ACVM Act) which includes an "Own use exemption" clause under Schedule 2 of the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines (Exemptions and Prohibited Substances) Regulations 2011 (the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations). The exemption permits beekeepers to produce and use formic acid and oxalic acid treatments on their own hives. Please see the attached NZ Ministry for Primary Industries Guidance Document Section 4 for details.

The ABA hereby proposes that Australia adopts a similar approach so that we can ensure our members and the greater beekeeping community consisting of over 29,600 registered beekeepers can benefit from an education program promoting the safe use of such treatments. We believe that this will help prevent personal injury and food contamination. Therefore, we respectfully request your support by adding such an exemption clause to the applicable APVMA legislation.

Warm regards,

Mike Allerton 0418 441 951
ABA Biosecurity Officer
biosecurity@beekeepers.asn.au

CC

Senator the Hon. Tara Moriarty, Minister for Agriculture
Danny Le Feuvre, Australian Honey Bee Industry Council CEO



Advertising and own use guidance for compounds for management of disease in beehives

5 November 2019

Title

Guidance Document: Advertising and own use guidance for compounds for management of disease in beehives

About this document

This document is intended to provide some basic guidance for beekeepers on the topics of:

- (1) advertising requirements for compounds intended to treat diseases in beehives; and
- (2) the compounding of substances for their own use.

Related Requirements

ACVM Registration Information Requirements for Agricultural Chemicals in New Zealand

Document history

Version Date	Sections changed	Change(s) Description
November 2019		New document

Contact Details

Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)
Assurance Directorate
ACVM Programmes & Appraisals
PO Box 2526
Wellington 6140

Email: approvals@mpi.govt.nz

Disclaimer

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1 Purpose

- (1) This document is intended to provide some basic guidance for beekeepers on the topics of:
 - a) advertising requirements for compounds intended to treat diseases in beehives; and
 - b) the compounding of substances for their own use.

2 Background

- (1) The importation, manufacture, sale or use of agricultural compounds in New Zealand is governed by the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997 (the ACVM Act). The purpose of the ACVM Act is to prevent or manage risks associated with agricultural compound use. These risks are risks to:
 - a) public health;
 - b) trade in primary produce;
 - c) animal welfare; and
 - d) agricultural security.
- (2) The ACVM Act also ensures residues in food comply with domestic residue standards. The ACVM Act achieves this purpose by providing that no agricultural compound may be used in New Zealand unless authorised under the ACVM Act.
- (3) An agricultural compound covers any substance (chemical or biological) used to manage directly (or indirectly) plants and animals for a range of specified purposes. It does include post-harvest use. Examples include agricultural chemicals, veterinary medicines, fertilisers, and feed for animals. The term 'agricultural compound' has a specific definition detailed in the ACVM Act.
- (4) Whether a product fits within the scope of an agricultural compound is made on a case-by-case basis depending on the usage and/or purpose of the product. If it does fit, then it would be considered an agricultural compound and subject to the requirements of the ACVM Act.
- (5) A product that is intended to control any pathogen of honey bees fits the definition of agricultural compound and must be authorised under the ACVM Act. This includes common diseases and parasites such as: *Varroa destructor*, *Nosema* spp. as well as viral and bacterial infections. In the case of agricultural compounds intended for use to control pathogens of honey bees, authorisation for use is usually through:
 - a) registration of a product; or
 - b) the own use exemption under Schedule 2 of the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines (Exemptions and Prohibited Substances) Regulations 2011 (the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations).
- (6) A product that is exempt from registration is still subject to the ACVM Act and there are requirements under the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations that importers, manufacturers, retailers and end users must follow.
- (7) Products that are registered under the ACVM Act have been assessed to ensure they are manufactured reliably, are efficacious (including management of resistance) and safe. Further, registration means that agricultural chemical residues in honey, when used according to label instructions, will comply with legislated limits. This level of regulatory oversight is not present if a beekeeper chooses to use a compound for their own use. In that situation the beekeeper is responsible for managing the risks associated with compounds they have prepared. If beekeepers do not manage the risks, then they could be subject to compliance action under the ACVM Act and its related legislation.
- (8) This document is intended to provide some basic guidance for beekeepers on the topics of:

- a) advertising requirements for compounds intended to treat diseases in beehives; and
- b) the compounding of substances for their own use.

The document has been written to address specific issues that commonly arise around these two topics, which should assist beekeepers in complying with the rules. It does not replace other ACVM-related legislation or information requirements. Beekeepers may have responsibilities under other legislation such as the Food Act 2014 or Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996.

3 Advertising of products

3.1 Claims

- (1) Advertising of product that makes a claim fitting the definition of an agricultural compound is only allowed if the product is either registered or complies with an exemption from registration category.
- (2) If the product is registered, it can be advertised. However, it cannot be advertised until it is registered.
- (3) Advertising must be limited to those claims on the approved label as part of the registration.
- (4) The above requirements also apply to advertising of a product that complies with an exemption from registration category. However, there is an important exception to this. Advertising of a product (or compound) that complies with the own use exemption is not permitted. This is because as soon as a person advertises this, the product (or compound) no longer complies with the own use exemption. For more details, see section 4 below on own use.

3.1.1 Examples of claims that are not permitted without registration

- (1) Claims made to control the following pathogens and parasites are not permitted unless the product is registered. This list is intended to provide examples only and is not exhaustive.
 - a) **Varroa destructor**: This pest is an ectoparasite of honey bees and is the key vector for transmitting *Deformed wing virus*. There are several products registered in New Zealand for the treatment of *Varroa*.
 - b) **Nosema spp**: These pests are microsporidian pathogens that affect honey bees. At the time of writing, two species of *Nosema* are confirmed to be present in New Zealand. There are no products currently registered for the treatment of *Nosema* in New Zealand.
 - c) **Viruses**: Many different viruses have been detected in honeybees. There are no products currently registered in New Zealand to treat viral infections of honey bees.
 - d) **Bacteria**: Many different bacteria are associated with honeybees. Some of these bacteria are pathogenic. There are no products currently registered in New Zealand to treat bacterial infections of honeybees.

3.1.2 Testimonials

- (1) Testimonials are a form of advertising. Therefore, use of testimonials for product that infer or make statements that the product manages a disease for bees is not acceptable unless the product is registered. For example, the following statements would be prohibited:
 - a) "The product controls *Varroa*."
 - b) "It's a great treatment for *Nosema*."
 - c) "There were no more deformed wings."
- (2) The ACVM team does not provide an advertising checking service. For further information on advertising, please see our [advertising guidance](#) document.

4 Own use exemption

- (1) Schedule 2 of the ACVM (Exemptions and Prohibited Substances) Regulations 2011 provides for an exemption from registration under the ACVM Act referred to as the 'own use' exemption. The exemption applies to a substance or compound prepared by a person for use on animals or plants that they own, or on any land, place or water that they own or occupy.
- (2) In a beekeeping context, the 'own use' exemption is commonly used when a beekeeper prepares and applies preparations containing generic substances, such as oxalic acid or formic acid, to their own hives for control of *Varroa* mites.
- (3) For the purposes of this exemption, it is important to note that:
 - a) The substance or compound must not be sold. Sale under the ACVM Act includes gifting.
 - b) The product must still be fit for purpose under the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations. The term 'fit for purpose' has a specific meaning under the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations. The elements of the definition that are most relevant to beekeepers are that the product should not:
 - i) reduce the efficacy of medicines used on humans;
 - ii) result in residues in primary produce that exceed the limits prescribed in applicable food residue standards set in or under any enactment;
 - iii) be toxic to animals treated with or exposed to the compound to an extent that causes unnecessary or unreasonable pain or distress;
 - iv) transmit disease, result in physical harm, or cause unnecessary pain and distress, to animals treated with or exposed to the compound;
 - v) transmit pests or unwanted organisms as defined in the Biosecurity Act 1993 or specified in any national or regional pest management plan made under that Act; or
 - vi) otherwise create or be likely to create any of the risks specified in section 4(a) of the ACVM Act.
- (4) It is the responsibility of the person using the compound to ensure its use complies with the fit for purpose and any other requirement under the ACVM (E&PS) Regulations. Part of this responsibility is that users have a good understanding of the compound and measures in place to ensure it remains fit for purpose when used. If this responsibility cannot be complied with, then the compound should not be used.
- (5) Failure to comply with any requirement under these ACVM Act or its Regulations, could lead to an investigation and potentially compliance action.



Meet your NSW Varroa Development Officers (VDOs)

Varroa Development Officers, or VDOs, are critical members of the *National Varroa Mite Management Program*.

Their role involves helping recreational and commercial beekeepers understand and implement Varroa management techniques, improve hive health and undertake sustainable hive practices.

Together with other team members, VDOs help improve industry resilience and capacity.

Across NSW, eight VDOs have been employed. Recruitment for similar roles in other states and territories is currently underway.

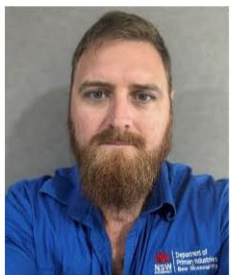
To get in contact with one of the below NSW-based VDOs, contact Dave Fairhall, Extension and Engagement Coordinator, **via email** at dave.fairhall@dpi.nsw.gov.au.



Alex Schellenberg

Alex has nine years of international commercial beekeeping experience including time spent in Canada and New Zealand.

Alex has extensive first-hand experience managing Varroa and other bee diseases and pests. Alex's hands-on approach can help beekeepers bridge the gap between knowledge and action. Alex is committed to working collaboratively with beekeepers to improve awareness, resilience and education.



Ben Stevenson

Ben is an experienced and passionate commercial beekeeper with years of practical knowledge instilled from a young age growing up on a farm.

As a result, Ben has a deep understanding of the land and a strong appreciation for the beekeeping lifestyle it entails. Ben is always keen to learn and expand his already considerable beekeeping knowledge.



Cameron Taylor-Brown

Cameron joined the *Varroa Mite Emergency Response* in March 2023 and has over seven years of experience in large-scale commercial beekeeping.

Having run his own commercial operation, Cameron is acutely aware of the potential impacts of Varroa on Australia's honey and pollination-dependent industries and is committed to helping these industries continue to grow and prosper.



Emily Noordyke

Emily also has extensive international Varroa experience having previously worked with the *Bee Informed Partnership Tech Transfer Team* in the US.

In this role Emily helped commercial beekeepers across America monitor their hive health and implement tailored Varroa management strategies.

Since moving to Australia, Emily has expanded her beekeeping knowledge by working with bee breeders as part of the *National Honey Bee Genetic Improvement Program*.



NATIONAL
Varroa Mite Management
PROGRAM



Harvey Howard

Harvey started his beekeeping career in the United Kingdom at just 15 years of age. In addition to his extensive international Varroa experience, Harvey specialises in teaching queen bee breeding and A.I in queens.

Having spent several years as a professional Rugby League player both abroad and in Australia for teams including the Brisbane Broncos, Harvey is perfectly suited to tackling your Varroa concerns.



Ross Graham

Ross has been a passionate beekeeper for several years establishing his own apiary in 2017. Soon after beginning his beekeeping journey, Ross joined the *Sydney Bee Club* and *Amateur Beekeepers Australia (ABA)*.

Ross is keen to help all beekeepers navigate any Varroa challenges and help beekeepers make informed decisions for their hives.



Simon Phillips

Simon is a seasoned educator and trainer with decades of practical hands-on beekeeping experience. Simon is keen to share his own insights and help mitigate the effects of Varroa across industries.

Simon is confident that by working together Australia's beekeeping community will continue to thrive and flourish.



Slavi Nenov

Slavi is another VDO with a comprehensive portfolio of international beekeeping experience having previously managed hives with Varroa in Europe and New Zealand.

Slavi has worked as a commercial beekeeper for over 20 years and understands how Varroa responds under different climatic conditions and environments.

In addition to pest management experience, Slavi is particularly interested in queen bee breeding and selection.

To contact the NSW Department of Primary Industries Varroa Hotline phone 1800 084 881 or email varroa.response@dpi.nw.gov.au

To learn more about Varroa mite visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/varroa