



News Release

The Slieau Whallian
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TBC

Formal disease-free status for bees a boost for Island

The European Union has declared the Isle of Man officially free of the bee pest Varroa – an announcement that provides an important economic and environmental boost.

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) has worked with beekeepers to gain the disease-free status.

A poster campaign will now be launched to raise public awareness of the status and ensure it is protected.

The Island has more than 800 beehives and aparies. While the importation of bees has long been prohibited, formal recognition that bees are free of disease is important for exports to the UK and Europe.

Varroa is a mite that attacks bees, weakening them and transferring viruses. Significant infestations can kill off entire colonies, with massive economic repercussions.

Work towards gaining the Varroa-free status started in 2008 with the passing of legislation that required beekeepers to register and empowered the Island's bee inspector, Harry Owens, to take samples.

Liaison with the UK National Bee Unit produced a scientifically robust method to demonstrate this freedom.

DEFA, with the assistance of beekeepers, collated the results and submitted the application to the EU and, last September, [Stuart Jaques](#), Chief Veterinary Officer, presented the Island's case in person to the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed.

[Richard Ronan MHK](#), Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture, said: 'At the end of a long and rigorous process, the EU has this month formally declared our bees disease-free.'

'It's quite something when we can show the world how a small jurisdiction can work hard, enhance its reputation and provide queen bees for research to aid the wider understanding of bee diseases.'

'We've also reached a position where we can fully protect our bee population and maintain and develop its genetic heritage for future generations.'

Mr Owens said: 'We export Varroa-free queen bees to England, Ireland and Germany for EU research purposes. I have been to many locations in the UK and beyond to promote our bees and their unique genetic heritage and am pleased beekeepers were so closely involved in gaining international recognition for the disease-free status of our bees.'

Posters will appear at ports and in other public places advising the public of the danger of illegally importing bees or beekeeping equipment that could spread disease.

Ends

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Notes for newsdesks:

Attached is a copy of the poster that will feature in the publicity campaign.

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