

## Statement Against Imports

The importation of non-native honey bees into Ireland continues. Beekeepers in Ireland want this practice to end immediately, to protect our native bees from the consequences of **hybridisation** and **imported disease, which potentially threaten ALL of Ireland's bee species**<sup>1</sup>.

### Hybridisation

The native Irish honey bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera* (*Amm*), also known as the Dark European honey bee, faces extinction by hybridisation throughout most of its original territory of Northern Europe. Ireland is the last bastion where pure strains of *Amm* still exist throughout. It is widely acknowledged that Ireland has a unique genetic resource which needs to be protected for the sake of *Amm*'s survival here as well as its use in European *Amm* breeding programmes<sup>2</sup>.

### Disease

All beekeepers in Ireland suffered the devastation of the imported Varroa mite. Continuing to import bees will introduce other pests and diseases and more virulent strains of pathogens already here:

- Small Hive Beetle, found in 2014 in Italy<sup>3</sup>, from where many bees are imported into Ireland.
- The new virulent Type 3 strain of European Foulbrood.
- Tropilaelaps mite.
- Pests, parasites, pathogens and viruses, currently unknown to science.

These may also pose a threat to our bumble, solitary and wild bee populations, 1/3 of which already face extinction<sup>5</sup>.

### Bees and Beekeeping

Anyone who loves bees, no matter what association or organisation they belong to, can understand the potential dangers. We lived through *Varroa*'s impact on bee populations, and now those who enjoy beekeeping as a hobby or who make a living from bees risk having their enjoyment and livelihood compromised once again. The serious economic impact of our pollinator populations declining as a direct result of the importation of non-native bees cannot be overstated.

A survey by the National University of Galway (NUIG) confirmed that about 90% of Irish beekeepers work with *Amm*<sup>4</sup>.

A separate survey by the Irish Beekeepers Association (IBA) showed that 82% use *Amm*, 7% Buckfast, 2% other and 5% do not know.

*Amm* is the preferred bee for most of Ireland's large-scale honey producers because it is so well adapted to our environment.

### The Problems

The mating of honey bees takes place up in the air often several miles away from their colony and hybridisation occurs when native *Amm* queens mate with non-native drones. The effects of hybridisation include:

- A range of behavioural changes including increased aggression, swarminess, poor over-wintering.
- Hybridised bees lack the evolved environmental adaptations of Irish *Amm*.
- Requeening hybridised stocks with replacement queens or uniting to other colonies is costly.
- Whole apiaries can be affected.
- *Amm* suppliers, rearing queens and nucs for years, have their small business destroyed overnight.

- Hybridised queens and nucs are not saleable.
- Honey bee importations will eliminate the native Irish black bee by corrupting the genes beyond retrieval - 'extinction by hybridisation'.
- The accidental importation of more pests and pathogens is a spectre no beekeeper wants to risk.

### **It is not too late to act!**

Many beekeepers have been working for years to improve, conserve and protect local bees by: bee improvement workshops, breeding programmes, queen-rearing groups, education etc. Beekeeping associations are creating Conservation Areas (CAs), where members agree to work only with *Amm*. Unfortunately, these CAs have no weight in law and are ignored by bee importers/traders.

To NIHBS, FIBKA, IBA, UBKA, and INIB, it makes no sense to import non-native bees to this island. It is unfair, unnecessary and potentially exposes our bees and beekeepers to significant risks.

Instead, we are committed to expanding sound bee improvement activities and propagating from existing *Amm* stocks. We urge everyone to respect our Irish *Amm* and not import any honey bees into any part of Ireland. We ask all beekeeping groups to encourage their members to purchase native local bees from reputable beekeepers.

### **While we still can, let us appreciate what we have, nurture it and save it for the future.**

Imports must **cease immediately** to protect our native bees from **hybridisation & imported disease**.

Loretta Neary, Chairperson - **Native Irish Honey Bee Society, NIHBS**

John Donoghue, CEO/President - **The Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Associations, FIBKA**

Damien Mac Aodha, Chairperson - **Irish Beekeepers Association, IBA**

John Hill, Chairperson - **Ulster Beekeepers Association, UBKA**

Michael Young, Chairperson - **Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers, INIB**

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**The Native Irish Honey Bee Society (NIHBS)** is an all-Ireland organisation of >1,000 members, whose sole aim is the conservation and preservation of the population of Native Irish Honey Bees, *Apis mellifera mellifera*.

**The Federation of Irish Beekeepers Associations CLG (FIBKA)** has approximately 3000 members. Among its aims is 'To promote the conservation of the native dark bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*, along with the provision of education in the beekeeping craft to its members.'

**The Irish Beekeepers Association CLG (IBA)** has approximately 1200 members from 24 affiliated local beekeeping associations. One of their objectives is to foster the skills of beekeeping in an environmentally sustainable manner.

**The Ulster Beekeepers Association (UBKA)** is an association of 16 affiliated local beekeeping associations in Ulster with approximately 1200 members.

**The Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers (INIB)** is a charitable organisation and an affiliated area association of the BBKA. It has a deep commitment to educating and informing the public about beekeeping. Each year the INIB runs a programme of events to help inform and educate people about honey bees and the craft of beekeeping.

### **References**

1. <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Summary-note-on-Irelands-bees.pdf>
2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218839.2018.1433949>
3. [Aethina tumida in Italy: updates \(izsvenezie.com\)](https://www.izsvenezie.com/)
4. [NUIG bee treatment survey | The Native Irish Honey Bee Society \(nihbs.org\)](https://www.nihbs.org/)
5. <https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-All-Ireland-Pollinator-Plan-2021-2025-WEB.pdf>

### **Other useful links**

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/2022-06-02/11/>

[BIBBA Opposes the Importation of Honey Bees and Queens - BIBBA](#)

[Small hive beetle in Italy \(from DGSAF\)](#)

[Invasive Species Alert for Asian Hornet | National Parks & Wildlife Service \(npws.ie\)](#)