

Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee

Comments by

Northern Ireland Environment Link

26 August 2010

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 58 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are agreed by Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

Prof Sue Christie, Director
Northern Ireland Environment Link
89 Loopland Drive
Belfast, BT6 9DW
P: 028 9045 5770
E: Sue@nienvironmentlink.org
W: www.nienvironmentlink.org

Northern Ireland Environment Link is a Company limited by guarantee No NI034988 and a Charity registered with Inland Revenue No XR19598

Northern Ireland Environment Link welcomes this strategy which will bring Northern Ireland into line with the situation in the rest of the UK. We agree with the main points of the document and feel it is a valuable step forward to ensure the sustainability of honeybee populations, the industry surrounding them, the agriculture industry which they support and the natural environment which also benefits from the bees' services. However, as with all strategies, it must be more than words; an action programme and the funding to implement it are required, and we worry that in the current financial situation this will be difficult to provide. The phrase 'subject to availability of resources' is particularly concerning in these times of financial strictures.

We are very supportive of the partnership approach with the beekeeping industry which is promoted in the strategy. The beekeepers are vital components in the delivery of the strategy and we hope that this is the first step in a continuing process of empowering and assisting the beekeepers of Northern Ireland, both professional and amateur, to play their part in the agricultural industry as a whole. Accordingly we welcome the strong emphasis on education and training to support and attract younger beekeepers. This should include recognition among the entire farming and wider community of the vital role that bees play in our economy and environment. Qualified people are required to deliver that educational and practical support which the industry requires if it is to thrive and be fully sustainable.

We agree that a strong emphasis must be placed on the health issues affecting the bees, including funding for research into local implications, but would wish to ensure that the wider issues of good countryside management, funding systems promoting management practices which support thriving bee populations and recognition of the huge role that honeybees play in the natural environment – as well as the major supportive role that the natural environment provides for bees - are fully recognised as vital components of this strategy.