Bee imports cannot depend on a country's report that a pest is absent

Brief to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency · November 2026

Background

Canada admits package bees and queens on the exporting country's certificate. Each approved source must be free of *Tropilaelaps*. Under the WOAH Terrestrial Code, a country or zone may qualify as historically free of the mite without a dedicated surveillance programme if it assesses the risk and meets the Code's general surveillance requirements. The certificate records what that country's authorities have found.

The trade is small. Canada imported an average of 45,922 kg of package bees per year from 2023 to 2025, or about 35,000 packages by the CBF's estimate. They came from New Zealand, Australia, Italy and Chile.

The CFIA told the CBF on July 6, 2026, that it would not normally suspend trade with WOAH-compliant partners on the basis of a theoretical risk. The record below shows the risk is not theoretical. Bee pests can become established a year or more before authorities report them, allowing time for them to spread.

Key facts

Varroa: Australia and New Zealand

- **A Canadian beekeeper reported varroa on a queen from an Australian package.** In a witness statement to Australian federal investigators, he identified two mites on a queen in a photograph he took when he opened the packages in British Columbia on March 6, 2022. Australia detected varroa at the Port of Newcastle on June 22, 2022.
- **Australia investigated its own export certificates.** Its Department of Agriculture began investigating the outbreak in 2023. In March 2024, an investigator wrote to a Canadian purchaser that the department was examining whether an exporter had breached permit conditions or given false information to obtain health certificates, and that the team would work with the CFIA. Its February 2026 report said the Newcastle outbreak may have begun between June 2021 and March 2022. When and how varroa entered Australia remained unknown.
- **New Zealand found varroa in April 2000.** The Auditor-General reported that it may have been present and undetected for up to five years.
- **Some New Zealand packages arrived with varroa levels above 1%.** The CFIA's 1% limit applies to the average in sampled colonies at the export operation. In spring 2025, Manitoba's provincial technology-transfer program sampled 80 New Zealand packages immediately after installation. They averaged 1.6 mites per 100 bees, with a high of 6. Varroa cannot reproduce in a broodless package during transit and reaching a level of 6% from under one would take no less than 61 days.

***Tropilaelaps*: the Black Sea and the Caucasus**

- **Georgia:** the mite was confirmed in western Georgia in summer 2024. The EU reference laboratory reported that it had likely been present there for at least a year. Beekeepers in Abkhazia reported suspected infestations in early 2024, before confirmation.
- **Turkey:** researchers found the mite near the Georgian border on July 26, 2026. Turkey confirmed the finding on July 31 and notified WOAH on August 31. Brood surveys from autumn 2024 through spring 2026 had found none. Maggie Gill estimated that the mite had been present for at least a year.
- **The general rule:** the EU reference laboratory reports that detection generally comes at least a year after the estimated introduction.
- **Notifications to WOAH can come late or not at all.** As the mite spread into Russia and the Caucasus, the EU reference laboratory found that almost no notifications had been made to WOAH. Turkey notified WOAH about five weeks after the field detection.
- **The mite is recorded in at least 18 countries**. One is Papua New Guinea, Australia's neighbour across the Torres Strait.

Sea routes: Italy and the Mediterranean

- **Asian honey bees have reached an Italian port.** In May 2024, researchers reported a colony of *Apis florea* on the wall of a container from India at the port of Gioia Tauro.
- **Malta, 2024:** an *A. florea* colony was found near Malta's main cargo port and destroyed. The authors considered arrival by sea the most likely explanation.
- **A broodless swarm carried the mite across the ocean.** In July 2025, a swarm of *Apis dorsata* carrying 28 *T. mercedesae* mites was intercepted on a container ship in the mid-Atlantic. It had no comb or brood. The researchers estimated 29 to 99 days on board if the swarm joined the ship in India, the origin they considered most likely.

The CFIA has already acted on this standard

- **Ukraine, 2024:** the CFIA suspended imports of queens and packages from Ukraine for the 2024 season because it could not conclude that *Tropilaelaps* was completely absent.

Request

The CBF asks the CFIA to **Immediately suspend imports of packages from outside of North America**

Then reassess all imports as follows:

- **Require each approved source country to state the surveillance and diagnostic method behind its declaration that it is free of *Tropilaelaps***, and accept a certificate only where that method can detect the mite.
- **Reopen the *Tropilaelaps* import risk assessment** and apply the standard used for Ukraine in 2024 to other source countries where surveillance cannot establish that the mite is absent and there are nearby detections of the mite, nearby arrivals of Asian honey bees by sea, or a record of breaches of Canadian import permits.

Contact: Connie Phillips, Executive Director, Canadian Beekeepers Federation, info@canadianbeekeepers.ca.

Find more information at canadianbeekeepers.ca.

Sources

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