

MP creates buzz on beekeepers' behalf

Report by
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THE GRIEVANCES of Swale beekeepers were aired in Parliament when Derek Wyatt tabled questions about the future of the native species.

The Sheppey MP was invited to Flynn's Bee Farm in Brambledown, where he met owner Sudi Austin and the chairman of the Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders' Association, Terry Clare.

The beekeepers are angry about the many threats facing their industry and the cuts proposed by the Government. They convinced Mr Wyatt to take their case forward.

Native dark honey bees were almost wiped out by the parasite varroa in 1992 and foreign bees were imported to boost numbers, leading to a less robust species.

The activity of bees is worth millions of pounds to the agricultural and horticultural industries, as well as being essential to ecological systems.

The Medway and North Kent Bee Breeders' group is trying to re-breed the native bee using apiaries on Sudi's land.

No funding is provided by the Government, unlike in other EU countries, and proposed cuts to existing facilities mean beekeepers are facing an uncertain future.

Mr Wyatt heard about plans to



Uncertain future: Derek Wyatt wants to protect the European honey bee.

halve staff numbers at the National Bee Inspectorate, which checks hives for parasites and diseases.

Inspectors also carry out monitoring and safe treatment of diseases, avoiding the use of antibiotics which can damage honey.

Mrs Austin, whose farm produces the natural remedy propolis, feels the projected saving of £250,000 is out of proportion with the industry's value.

She said: "Any help that might have been offered to me has just been taken away."

Scientists at the internationally

renowned Rothamsted Research Centre in Hertfordshire, which houses the world's leading reference library on bee viruses, are to be made redundant in February. Mr Wyatt was horrified to hear this and said: "DNA is the key to our future and survival."

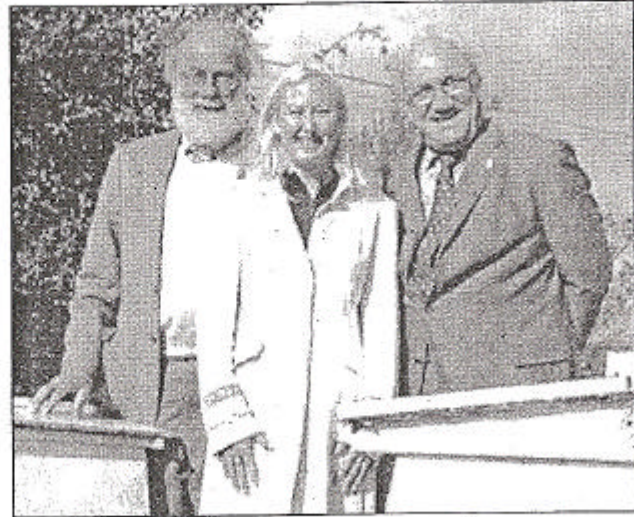
Mr Clare and other industry representatives met horticulture minister Lord Bach on Thursday.

Mr Wyatt put forward six questions and is awaiting the responses.

He said: "The visit to the bee farm was fascinating and the group is doing a good job."



Nature's medicine: Derek Wyatt with a lump of raw propolis.



Concerns: Terry Clare and Sudi Austin enlist the help of MP Derek Wyatt to highlight their fears for beekeeping.