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## Terence Corcoran: The bees are okay, the policy is sick



TERENCE CORCORAN | June 11, 2015 | Last Updated: Jun 11 3:07 PM ET

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## ***Ontario follows extreme green plan to save record bee colonies***

Ontario and Canadian bees appear to be doing great, with more bees busy producing more honey than ever. But that means nothing to Ontario's All-Green All-the Time Minister of the Environment, Glen Murray. On Tuesday, Murray announced that his government will be the first jurisdiction in North America to protect bees. What a guy: The beekeepers' beekeeper.

That bees may not be in need of government protection seems not to have occurred to Murray, his ears instead tuned to the steady buzz of green activists who have created a global scare about a bee crisis allegedly brought on by pesticides. In response, Murray announced new anti-pesticide regulation to reduce by 80 per cent the number of acres Ontario corn and soybean farmers can treat with neonicotinoid pesticides.

## **The country's total number of bee colonies has increased by 136,000 since 2008**

The objective, he said, was to "improve pollinator health," by which he means the health of bees as opposed to the health of farmers and the farm economy. As for the bees, they have no voice per se, but there are statistics. A table below shows bee colonies at an all time high, nationally and in Ontario. So is bee output, apparently. Speaking in the House of Common's Wednesday, federal agriculture minister Gerry Ritz highlighted some of the data. "The country's total number of bee colonies has increased by 136,000 since 2008. Canadian beekeepers are producing almost 26,000 more pounds of honey than five years ago. Honey farm cash receipts have increased by \$65,000 per farm since 2008, and in 2012, beekeepers produced 90 million pounds of honey worth \$173 million, so those are some pretty good stats."

Stats schmatz. In a news release accompanied by backgrounders and links to approximately four billion pages of related documents, Ontario appears not to acknowledge that the province's bee population is at a record. Instead, the province prefers to link to about a billion pages off-site material and repeat the scary story about Ontario's "unusually higher winter losses of honey bees, reaching 58 per cent following the winder of 2013-14."

No other province experienced similar losses, and there is no evidence to suggest that the use of neonicotinoid pesticides was the factor in Ontario's mysterious over-winter loss, unless it was a few botched management by a few colonies.

The Sierra Club, Environmental Defence Canada and other activists are riding herd on Murray, pushing the government relentlessly to use the possibly false bee scare as a vehicle to begin aggressive and extreme regulation of pesticides. They managed to outlaw lawn grass pesticides years ago; farm pesticides are next on the agenda.

Ontario's release of background information, in claiming to be the first jurisdiction in North America to begin curbing neonicotinoids, comes with a link to the U.S. government's honey bee strategy report. But Ontario fails to note that the U.S. approach is based on a careful assessment of the science, a balanced approach that takes in all sides. No such balance exists in Ontario.

The Senate of Canada may not carry much weight these days politically, but the Senate's Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry last month produced a serious and cautionary review of the bee health issue. In its report, *The Importance of Bee health to Sustainable Food Production in Canada*, the committee reviews evidence heard from beekeepers, farmers, scientists, experts from Europe and the United States. It's conclusion: We need more science, which is more or less what the U.S. report said.

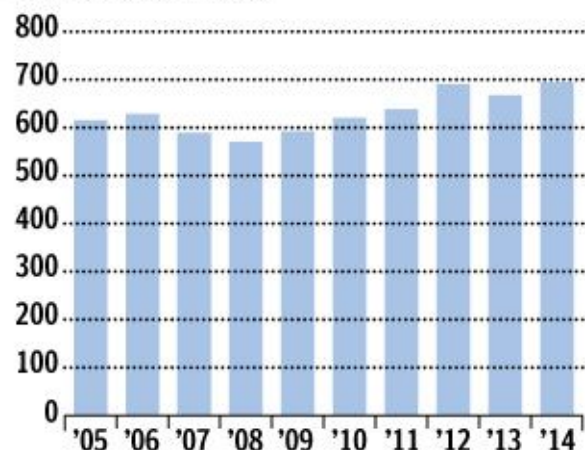
On the link between pesticides and bee health, the Senate committee said: "The possible correlation between bee mortality and the use of neonicotinoid insecticides has also been identified in foreign jurisdictions." The words "possible correlation" are a sign the link between bee deaths and careful pesticide has not been nailed down.

Ontario is also charging ahead without waiting for the final report of Ottawa's Pest Management Regulatory Agency on the bee-pesticide controversy.

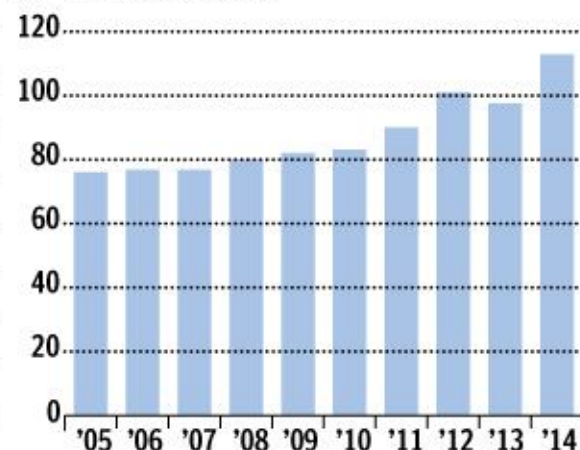
So there's a lot of buzz around bees and pollinator policy, but the good news is that, above it all, the bees are okay. It's Ontario's farmers who be stung, now and in the future under Glen Murray's anti-pesticide regime.

## *BEE COLONIES STILL GROWING*

**NUMBER OF HONEY BEE COLONIES IN CANADA**  
IN THOUSANDS



**NUMBER OF HONEY BEE COLONIES IN ONTARIO**  
IN THOUSANDS



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL APICULTURISTS

JONATHON RIVAIT / NATIONAL POST