INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATIONS

POLICY BRIEF

HONEY BEE WELFARE FRAMEWORK FOR WOAH

1. Executive Summary

Issue

Lack of a dedicated honey bee animal welfare framework within WOAH standards, despite their critical role in global pollination and food security.

Why it matters:

Honey bees pollinate 75% of flowering plants and 30% of crops, supporting biodiversity, agriculture, and ecosystems worth billions annually.

Key gap:

WOAH addresses bee diseases and pests but omits comprehensive welfare standards, unlike for vertebrates. https://www.woah.org/en/disease/diseases-of-bees/

Main recommendation(s):

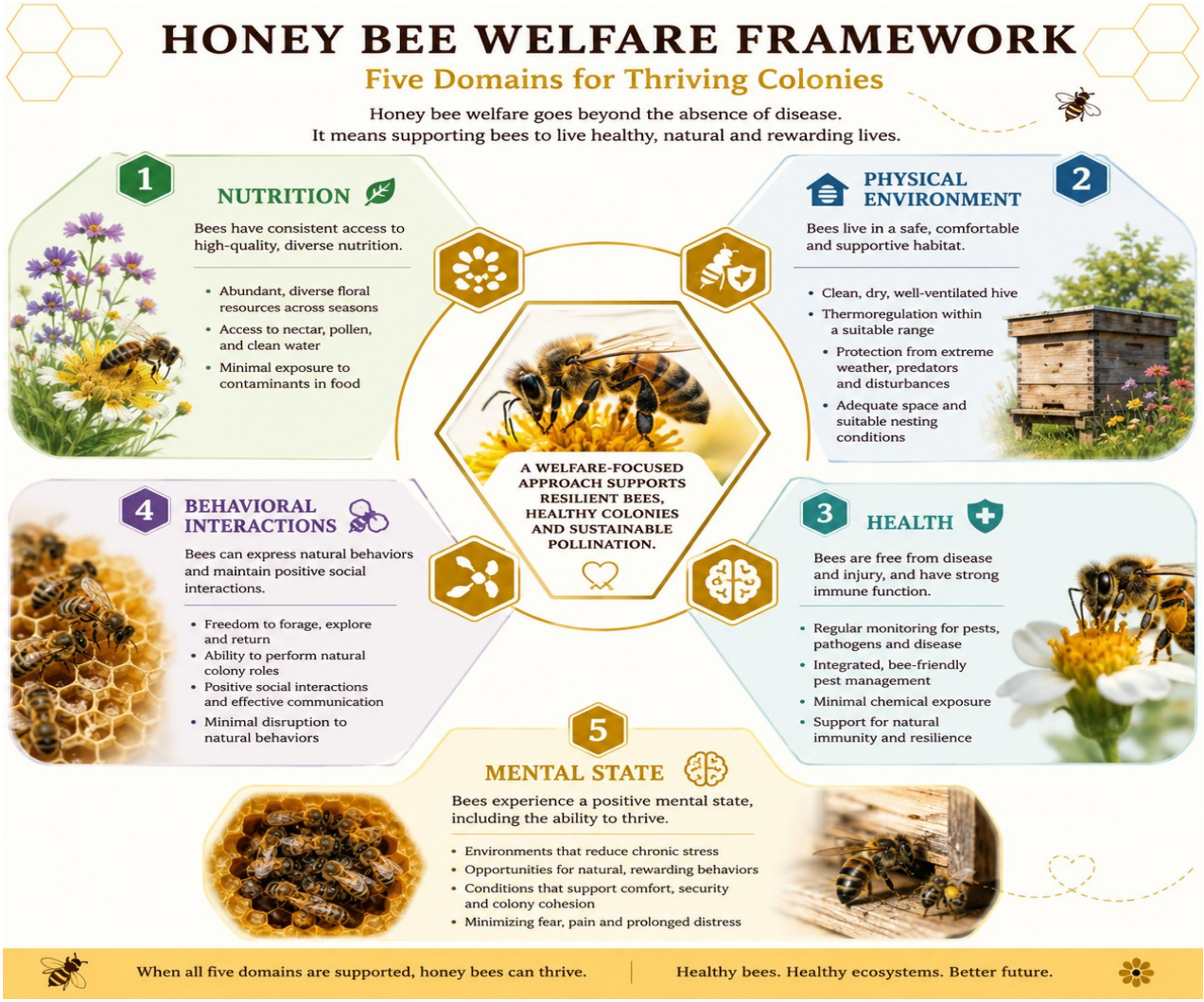
It is recommended to develop and adopt a Honey Bee Welfare Framework integrating One Welfare principles into WOAH's Terrestrial Animal Health Code. *Chapter: 7.1. Introduction to the recommendations for animal welfare.*

Target institution(s):

WOAH (World Organisation for Animal Health). https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/standards/codes-and-manuals/

2. Background and Context

- **Status:** Honey bees face threats from parasites (e.g., *Varroa destructor*), diseases, pesticides, environmental pressure, and poor management, leading to colony losses worldwide.



- **Existing international/national framework:** WOAH provides standards for bee diseases and surveillance, excluding welfare-specific guidelines for these insects.
- **Relevance to animal health/sustainability/One Health:** Honey bee welfare encompasses the protection of colony health, provision of adequate nutrition and suitable environmental conditions, and safeguards against management practices, chemicals, and trade activities that compromise bees' biological needs and ability to perform natural behaviors.
- Bee health links to environmental sustainability, food production, and human well-being via pollination; welfare practices enhance resilience under One Welfare.

3. Problem Statement

- **What is not functioning effectively?**
  Disease-focused standards ignore welfare factors like nutrition, housing, intoxication, transport, and multiple stressors, exacerbating colony declines and ruining the One Health approach.
- **What is missing?**
  Honey bee welfare science, including Four Domains model applications for BEES

(nutrition, environment, health, behavior), **and Mental State** that we still do not understand in this species.

- **What is the regulatory/institutional gap?**
  WOAH's welfare scope excludes *Apis mellifera,* limiting global veterinary integration in apiculture.
- **Who is affected?**
  Honey bees, wild pollinators, beekeepers' knowledge and skills, farmers, ecosystems, and food systems are reliant on pollination services.

4. Evidence Base

Evidence point **1:** Varroa mites, viruses, bacteria, and fungi cause vitality losses and deaths. Pesticides all around are a big threat to intentional and unintentional bee colony suffering.

Evidence point **2:** Honey Bee Welfare Practices have been increasingly scientifically investigated to assess their overall impact on Honey Bee, Human, and Environmental Welfare, to identify new One Welfare Practices in Apiculture. One Welfare categorizes 243 practices benefiting bees, humans, and the environment.

Evidence point **3:** Pollination by bees supports biodiversity and prevents soil erosion; welfare decline threatens this important impact, and extends beyond agriculture, making them essential for maintaining healthy, thriving natural environments. Protecting honey bee populations is crucial for both the environment and the future of global biodiversity.

Optional data source/reference:
WOAH, Terrestrial Code Chapter on varroosis issues. 9.6; PMC articles on bee welfare.

5. Policy Gap Analysis

- Structural limitation: WOAH standards prioritize vertebrates; *Apis mellifera* species fall out the welfare chapters.
- Coordination gap**:** Limited veterinary involvement in apiculture beyond disease, missing holistic welfare.
- Institutional barrier: **No WOAH Reference Labs for bee welfare**, only diseases (e.g., foulbrood). World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres that specifically cover animal welfare topics, in addition to disease-specific laboratories that incorporate welfare considerations into their studies.
- Underutilized stakeholder(s): Apimondia, beekeepers, researchers in One Welfare for bees.

6. Recommendations

- WOAH establishes a Honey Bee Welfare Working Group to develop standards based on Five Domains and One Welfare.
- Integrate welfare into Terrestrial Code (e.g., new Chapter 7 on bee welfare metrics).

- Mandate veterinary oversight for honey bee colony health, toxicology, and welfare audits.
- Collaborate with FAO and Apimondia for **global implementation**.

7. Implementation Pathway

Lead institution: WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission.

Key Leadership & Contact Information (2026):

- President of the Council: Dr. Susana Pombo (Portugal)
- Director General: Dr. Emmanuelle Soubeyran
  Headquarters Address: 12, rue de Prony, 75017 Paris, France
  Phone: +33 (0)1 44 15 18 88 Email: woah@woah.org
  Website: www.woah.org

Supporting actors:

✓ Apimondia AWG GVPA, FAO, National veterinary services.
✓ **Short-term action (0-12 months):** Expert consultation and draft framework.
✓ **Medium-term action (1-3 years):** Adoption, pilot programs, training.
✓ **Resource considerations:** Leverage existing bee disease labs; minimal new funding via partnerships.

8. Expected Impact

❖ **Improvement in honey bee health:** Reduced colony losses via better practices (e.g., 20-30% via hygiene).
❖ **Strengthened veterinary integration:** Veterinarians as key apiculture advisors.
❖ **Governance improvement:** First insect welfare standards, setting precedent.
❖ **Sustainability contribution:** Enhanced pollination for food security and biodiversity.

9. Key Stakeholders

- WOAH Member Countries' veterinary services.
- Apimondia and AWG GVPA.
- FAO Agriculture Departments.
- Beekeepers' associations globally.

Authors and Contributors

Developed by members of the Apimondia Working Group on Good Veterinary Practice in Apiculture (AWG GVPA): Violeta Santrac, violeta.santrac@virs-vb.com; Fani Hatjina, beehealth@apimondia.org; Maja Ivana Smodiš Škerl, Maxim Chernik, Giovanni Formato, Elmar

Ervin Ebner, Sava Lađanac, Mustafa N. Muz, Ivana Tlak Gajger, Anna Gajda, Christophe Roy, Egehan Onat Özfen, Frnaco Mutinelli, Isabella Lippi, Kazimir Matović, Michela Bertola, Metka Pislak Ocepek, Uroš Glavinić, Saša Grubić,

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