

# How the world can save bees and pollinating insects

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Credit: Australian National University

An international research team has released a top-10 list of ways countries can protect pollinating insects such as bees, which are vital for food production, following worrying declines in pollinating insect populations in America and Europe.

Co-author Dr Saul Cunningham, newly appointed director of the Fenner

School of Environment and Society at The Australian National University (ANU), said these insects are extremely important for Australia's high-value agriculture industry which produces fruits, nuts and seeds.

"Almonds are one of our biggest exports and the much-loved avocados, cherries, and mangoes all rely heavily on our [pollinating insects](#)," he said.

The recommendations, published in *Science*, include improving pesticide regulations, retaining habitat on farms, and establishing long-term monitoring programs.

Dr Cunningham said Australia was doing well in some areas, but falling behind in others.

"Australia is a world leader in some areas such as biosecurity, but we could be doing better when it comes to land care strategies and education," he said.

"To date, we have been very effective at keeping bee diseases out of Australia and limiting the expansion of exotic bumblebees, but we need to stay vigilant if we aim to retain these wins," he said.

Bumblebees are effective for pollinating greenhouse crops and many Australian greenhouse producers have called for an end to the ban on bumble bee imports.

However, Dr Cunningham said importing bumblebees could pose a serious risk to Australia and to native bee populations.

"It's true that [bumble bees](#) would help to pollinate crops in greenhouses, but importing them would create serious risks for other crops and for natural environments," he said.

"They have outcompeted native species, spread diseases, and reduced pollination of some crops in many of the countries where they have been introduced."

He said bees and pollinators would also benefit from policies to protect habitat, such as fence-line plantings, scattered trees and grassland patches, which allow pollinating insects to move through the farming landscape more easily.

"We used to do this really well in Australia through government supported programs, but these have dwindled. There is less going on now because there are fewer incentives for farmers to improve biodiversity within farms," he said.

"The paper shows that there are practical things we can do to improve pollination for food, and that good programs exist around the world.

"The opportunity is with us now to help Australian farmers to be productive, and at the same time help support healthier ecosystems."

Provided by Australian National University

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