COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Reference: Future development of the Australian honey bee industry

MONDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2007

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Monday, 3 September 2007

Members: Mr Schultz *(Chair)*, Mr Adams *(Deputy Chair)*, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest, Mrs Mirabella, Mr Gavan O'Connor, Mr Secker, Mr Tuckey and Mr Windsor

Members in attendance: Mr Adams, Mr Michael Ferguson and Mr Schultz

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Honey bee industry in terms of:

1. Its current and future prospects.
2. Its role in agriculture and forestry.
3. Biosecurity issues.
4. Trade issues.
5. The impact of land management and bushfires.
6. The research and development needs of the industry.
7. Existing industry and Government work that has been undertaken for the honey bee industry.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.01 am

DIREEN, Mrs Jennifer Ruth, Member, Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc.

HOSKINSON, Mr Hedley Leyland, Executive Member, Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc.

WOLFHAGEN, Mr Julian Mark, President, Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc.

CHAIR (Mr Schultz)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for its inquiry into the future development of the Australian honeybee industry. This is the sixth public hearing of this important inquiry. Today the committee will hear from a range of witnesses representing the government and the honeybee industry in Tasmania.

I welcome representatives of the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association. Do you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Hoskinson—I am the southern branch president. I have been a member of the TBA for 53 years.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament.

The committee has received a submission from the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association. Are there any corrections or amendments that you would like to make to your submission?

Mr Wolfhagen—No.

CHAIR—Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or some introductory remarks?

Mr Wolfhagen—Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and assist with your inquiry. Firstly, I would like to briefly talk on the main points in our submission, No. 63, and the supplementary submission recently presented to you. Secondly, I would like to make a few comments on looking ahead—the future strategy for the Tasmanian beekeeping industry. Finally, Mr Hedley Hoskinson, a pioneer in our industry, would like to briefly elaborate on some of the key issues.

The key points include: beekeeping in Tasmania is a mature and iconic Tasmanian industry that provides jobs in rural areas and is a significant contributor to the state's economy. Leatherwood underpins the beekeeping industry and industries reliant on honeybee pollination—for example, fruit and seed crops. Significant growth prospects within our industry and reliant industries exist, but these are at risk from the loss of the resource—that is, leatherwood and other species. There is great potential under federal government initiatives—product development,

training and education including skills transfer. Biosecurity is a critical issue to maximise the pest and disease incursion risks elimination. The pure strain of black bees is a vital asset to not only Tasmania but the world, and it needs protecting to ensure the future vigour and vitality of the industry.

Confirmation is respectfully requested for the intent to improve accessibility to leatherwood resource under the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement's $11.4 million provision. Enforceable protection provisions in the Forest Practices Code for leatherwood are absolutely critically needed. It should also include a right of appeal. Research and development initiatives are needed to enhance the industry, and there are significant misconceptions about current and future leatherwood accessibility and protection and about the alternatives to leatherwood.

Looking ahead, the TBA has been active in identifying solutions in a whole-of-government approach to future needs of this important industry. In 2005, the TBA developed a seven-point plan for the future of the industry. Key elements of this plan were to define the leatherwood sustainable yield, develop a strategy to achieve that yield, allocate hives strategically, market and brand leatherwood, develop pollination services, research and develop efficient resource opportunities and implement the plan. We respectfully request the standing committee to assist with funding for a secretariat position for the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association to help develop the various initiatives identified in our submission and to ensure that the Tasmanian beekeeping industry can develop to its full potential. I would ask Hedley, if I may, as a pioneer of our industry, to add some points.

Mr Hoskinson—I would like to elaborate on different climatic conditions in the south of the state compared to the mainland and the north-west coast, where they have much better soils and much better rainfalls. In the south, we have very poor soil and poor climatic conditions as far as rainfall is concerned on our east coast, and in summer, as some of our submissions point out, we are getting honeyflows off eucalypts which are very irregular. We have members in our association who have been back here since 1990, and they have not had anything off the eucalypts since they have been back in the game.

The other thing mentioned is prickly box. Our prickly box flowers every year, but the rainfall has to come at the right time, just prior to or during flowering time. It yields quite well. The other disadvantage with the prickly box is that we have two beetles. One is the cockchafer beetle; I cannot remember the name of the other one. They get on it in force and either they leave a pheromone or something behind on it or they sit on it day and night, sucking the nectar out of it, and our bees will not look at it. It is not a dependable flower, as stated—as far as I can read—in other submissions presented to you.

The other thing is that signed agreements with Forestry have achieved nothing—not even one tree. I will leave it at that until question time.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Hoskinson. Mrs Direen, do you want to make any comment, or are you happy to take questions?

Mrs Direen—No, I am happy to take questions.

Mr ADAMS—Thanks very much for your submission and for being with us today. As the inquiry goes on, we are making sure that there is an industry in the long term in pollination and honeybee and honey production. Could you just give us, from a Tasmanian perspective, your thoughts as an association on the long-term profitability of the honeybee industry in Tasmania, both in being able to offer pollination services and in the production of honey?

Mr Wolfhagen—I believe that there is significant potential for growth. Currently it does not enjoy the prosperity that it perhaps deserves. There is a vital link for our viability between honey production—in this case, in Tasmania, it is leatherwood, which represents 70 to 80 per cent of our production—and our ability to provide pollination. I gather that some issues have developed around pollination as a stand-alone, but personally, from a professional beekeeping point of view, I doubt that that is really feasible. If it were, it would be exceedingly expensive as a service to recoup and provide a viable enough business. That is one of the problems in our industry. As you probably would have heard, we share with other agricultural industries an ageing population. We lack the thing that draws new people into the industry.

Mr ADAMS—Profitability.

Mr Wolfhagen—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—Would anybody else like to comment?

Mrs Direen—I think there is huge potential for the industry. A lot of producers are value-adding products to get a greater return. I find that we are at an advantage. I find that, when we are doing direct marketing to the public, the greatest sales of honey are actually in wintertime. In the summer, we have a lot of tourists coming into this area, and they are buying gifts to take away. So you have good sales all year round if you are at the right markets, and there is huge potential for market development.

Mr ADAMS—Something mentioned in your submission—and one of the things you just touched on, Julian—was growth opportunities and skilled people. How are we going with training people either through TAFE or through vocational education at high school level? We have a bit of a new focus in those areas. Are there opportunities for people coming through there?

Mr Wolfhagen—Certainly. We have been working as an industry on participating through a rural industries training program to develop the competency standards. I gather that that process is somewhere within the system. It has not been fully actioned, and I am not au fait with all of the processes that these programs need to go through, but it is somewhere in train. Once we have that then hopefully we can encourage people from school age to consider it as a viable and, indeed, an exciting career path.

Mr ADAMS—It is all about floral resources, getting access to the flowers and getting access to leatherwood. The figure I have in my head is that about 60 per cent of our leatherwood is in reserves and conservation areas and is probably hard to access; would that be a true picture?

Mr Wolfhagen—It is hard to know because we do not have good, solid science or knowledge of distribution. We have some work that was done by Karen Ziegler back in the early nineties.

Much of that was the mapping that was done using photo interpretive mapping, so it was representative. Much of the area that is involved could quite easily be high altitude, which means it is of minimal value to the industry. Most of the lower altitude areas fall within state forest, as they contain the wealth of the forest, I guess. It is hard to say. In my view there certainly are some areas, but I do not believe it is a significant area that is locked up or inaccessible. I do not believe it would be as high a percentage as 60 per cent.

Mr ADAMS—Would it be a plus if we could open accessibility to that resource?

Mr Wolfhagen—It would, definitely.

Mr ADAMS—You mentioned an issue that I am not quite familiar with: altitude. What altitude does a bee fly at? What is the bee's limit?

Mr Wolfhagen—There is no limitation. There are obviously physical limitations as to how high they can go, like all of us. In the right weather conditions—for example, in a recent bushwalk in the autumn we saw bees on the paths of Mount Anne—they can go up there, but the working time at that altitude is much shorter. The degree of inclemency in the weather at that altitude is much greater so that, from a beekeeping point of view at a high altitude—and some of us have apiary sites in relatively high areas—they are marginalised in poor weather conditions.

Mrs Direen—What constitutes a good apiary site is when we have a good elevation range. The leatherwoods start flowering at the lower altitude and then it progresses. There can be a six-week window where we have a harvest period. We get a minimal amount of honey from the leatherwood milliganii but it can be a bonus if we can get any nectar off that. Some sites have been reduced to a smaller elevation range in that they only have a two-week window, so production varies from site to site.

Mr Hoskinson—I would like to elaborate; I did not get a chance there. There is no future for the industry without a good viable leatherwood base for us because, particularly in the south, we have no other base for the industry, only our leatherwood. It is our only reliable source of nectar. Some years we take our bees to the leatherwood without even taking any honey off them. The resource is so minimal, and without a good base behind the industry there would not be a future.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—In your opening remarks you made a comment that, despite the value of commitments made under agreements and undertakings which have been made in previous years, you have not seen any additional security. Would you like to elaborate on those comments?

Mr Hoskinson—Unfortunately, we do not have the time to go into great detail. I have been putting in submissions for 30-odd years and have achieved nothing, apart from getting a signed agreement when I was going to take the beekeepers out on strike. We were going to refuse to do any pollinating unless we got resource security, but I was informed on and Forestry very quickly got a signed agreement, because our executive did not know what was going on—I was not going to inform them until the next executive meeting. So they very sneakily got the TBA committee to sign an agreement, not knowing what I intended to do. It was so weak—a seven-year-old child would not have signed it. It had no substance in it whatsoever and they just used it for propaganda. It never saved one tree.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—What agreement were you referring to there?

Mr Hoskinson—The agreement that was mentioned in another submission—

Mr Wolfhagen—The guidelines to facilitate the western state forests.

Mr Hoskinson—It never saved a tree. Then the RFA inquiry came along. I put a submission into that. They said, 'Hedley, we're very sorry, we don't think there is anything we can do for you, because of the terms of reference.' We were excluded from the terms of reference of the RFA. We were virtually reliant on the forest which they were inquiring into for 100 per cent of our industry, and we were excluded from it.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Can I bring you forward a little closer to the present time. Two or three years ago the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement was signed and since then has been executed. How do you believe that has or has not assisted your industry, because there were specific provisions in there relating to leatherwood? What is your view and what are the views of the other members of the panel?

Mr Hoskinson—At the present time there have been token suggestions that they are going to do something for us. I can tell you about five coupes. They saved a little bit of leatherwood in two of them. In three others they are not going to save a tree for us—forestry comes first. So we are going to get a token out of two of the five, and this is going to continue at this stage through the forestry. The important thing is that—

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Mr Hoskinson, these coupes are state forests that are being harvested under a plan of some kind. You are saying that of the last five coupes that have been opened up your industry has had access to two but not access to—

Mr Hoskinson—No, we have got access to all of them. In two of them they have saved a little bit of leatherwood. The other three are going to be clear-felled and burnt and not one tree will be saved in them. At the present time that is the thought of the forest industry because they have to supply a certain amount of timber annually to sawmilling and to woodchips, otherwise they have to pay those industries—not a bonus, but replace it with finance.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I appreciate what you are saying. In the past would you have had that level of protection in the two out of the five?

Mr Hoskinson—No, we have had none. It was totally clear-felled and burnt after 1964.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—My question really is: is it better now than it used to be, given that they have at least secured stands of leatherwood in two of five coupes? Is that better than where we were?

Mr Hoskinson—Anything is better than where we were before. We were getting nothing before, but this little token every now and again from some coupes is not going to maintain this industry in the future.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—For protection of leatherwood in a coupe, does it generally stand in clumps or groups, or is it scattered throughout so that it is not possible for a forestry operation to be viable in a coupe.

Mr Hoskinson—In some coupes there are small areas they can put aside for us where there is only a little of the hardwood that they are after or other minor species for veneers. But when it grows through the forest, like in the three coupes we are talking about, they cannot save us anything because they cannot selectively log these days.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—So you are saying that in the three of the five you were unable to secure protection, if you like, of leatherwood stands because they were more distributed throughout the other species?

Mr Hoskinson—It was distributed all the way through, exactly. They cannot even take a corner off where there is a large amount of leatherwood and a very minimal—

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I am trying to see both sides. Can you appreciate that?

Mr Hoskinson—I understand that.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—What would be the view of the other members here?

Mr Wolfhagen—I will take you back to your original question. The Community Forest Agreement had the reference to beekeeping in the roading, the $11.4 million for special timbers management unit and beekeeping. That may assist us—but only may. We were not consulted about where those roads might be for the best advantage of beekeeping. They were ostensibly set down for retrieval of timber. If they assisted beekeeping perhaps that was a side benefit. Bees fly significant distances cross-country, of course. Some of those areas that have the new roading had bees overflying them. Perhaps it allowed some apiary sites to be put further back to the fringes, which enabled the bees then to fly out into the fringe areas or into conserved lands beyond state forest. The Community Forest Agreement was a minimal benefit to us.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—That is one aspect of the Community Forest Agreement. Could you help me on this. I also understood that there was a specific provision in the Community Forest Agreement for leatherwood insofar as it concerns your industry. Can you give me a steer on how useful or not useful that has been? There was a fact sheet that came through as one of the initiatives under the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement. I recall that there was some sort of specific provision for your industry. You do not believe that is the case?

Mr Wolfhagen—I do not recall, no.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—It may be my mistake but that is my recollection. My last question is to anyone from the association: given that the issues you are raising go to well outside your industry relating to forest practices and so on—the very contentious debate of forestry—do you have some commonsense suggestions about achieving a better result for your industry while coexisting with the forestry industry?

Mr Wolfhagen—There have been developments. There has been close communication between Forestry Tasmania and Tasmanian beekeepers, particularly over the last few years. Obviously it has been ongoing, as my colleague Hedley referred to earlier, but in my involvement in the last three years as president and some years before that heading up the TBA's resource subcommittee, we have had good and meaningful communications with forestry. They have been redressing coupe boundaries in certain areas to minimise the impact on leatherwood. That has been a significant benefit to us; however, I believe their remit does not allow them to facilitate our industry as much as the timber industry, of course. That is a matter of debate because of the size of the industries, but for the future benefit of the industry we need to see leatherwood getting formal recognition within the Forest Practices Code.

We are seeing a move in harvesting away from clear fall. We are seeing in the Community Forest Agreement a reduction in the amount of clear fall, which has to be a benefit. Managing the coupes with apiaries in mind under the selective harvesting program will benefit the beekeeping industry, but we need to see leatherwood getting some sort of regulatory recognition. At the moment it comes down to the goodwill of the planners and harvesters to see that after the implementation of the plan leatherwood is protected.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—If I may ask another question; you are not going to stop me, are you?

CHAIR—No, I am not but I want to remind you that this is about beekeeping, not the forestry industry.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Given that it is well outside the remit of this inquiry, can you say if there are any commonsense or maybe easy arrangements that could assist your industry without going back to all of those other matters?

Mr Wolfhagen—The broader range of issues in training, research and development from not only honey production and marketing but also the pollination industry are all benefits that would assist the industry.

CHAIR—We have taken evidence that indicates that there is a significant need for a national centre for research training and extension for the honeybee and related industries. We have also heard evidence that there is a significant shortage of research and extension services being provided by the industry and certainly by governments. Would you like to comment on, first of all, your association's views on the creation of a national centre for research training and extension? My second question is: what research and extension services are provided to the industry by the Tasmanian government, as an example?

Mr Wolfhagen—We support the initiative. To date, there has been minimal extension. In the Tasmanian state area we have an extension provided through the Department of Primary Industries and Water, but that is pretty much the extent of it. Certainly, federally, we need to see these initiatives that you referred to.

CHAIR—Would you say that all levels of state and territory governments, and indeed the federal government, have ignored the honeybee industry because it has been seen as insignificant? As an example of what I am talking about, I understand that here in Tasmania you

produce about $6.7 million worth of honey products in your industry. That is what people are focused on. Across Australia we are producing about $60 million worth of honey and honeybee products but nobody has thought very seriously about the extension services of honey bees, which is the pollination process, and what they do to industry as a whole. It has been estimated on the mainland, as an example, that honeybee pollination contributes to food crops worth about $1.7 billion or $2 billion to the economy. Do you think it is because of that sort of attitude that it has been very difficult for you to convince anybody, let alone the forestry industry, how important your industry is?

Mr Wolfhagen—Undoubtedly. Tasmanian beekeeping production is something like $6 million to $7 million, but our impact on agriculture is estimated at $200 million. You are absolutely correct. We are ignored or at least do not have political clout. Because we are such a small industry numerically, we just not have not attracted the attention. I think there is a genuine lack of awareness of the real value of bees within our society and our economy. I believe that is being recognised by this inquiry to some extent. The beekeeping industry is very aware that we live in a very politicised age. Even though the beekeeping industry has been holding up our value and our greater value through pollination as justification, it has really has been falling on deaf ears. Hopefully, that is about to change.

CHAIR—Can I make another observation to you. In our evidence taking we have been educated on the reality that the size of your industry means it is unable generate enough income through the levy process to get into serious research and development that is going to help your industry and that this has been going on for some time. It would appear that the senior educational facilities and infrastructure throughout the country, because of the dollar driven operations today, have not got up any extension services or appropriate courses that would attract people into the honeybee industry, particularly the technical end.

It has been suggested by CSRIO in evidence taking that the government needs to very seriously consider injecting about $50 million per annum into the honeybee industry to deal with the shortcomings in skilled labour coming through the industry and to ensure that our ability to capitalise on a very significant market that has occurred as a result of diseases that are killing bees offshore is at an appropriate level. Would you like to make some comment about that sort of contribution from government—$50 million per annum into research and development and setting up the infrastructure to ensure that your industry attracts younger people and scientists to the extent where it can remain viable?

Mr Wolfhagen—Certainly. I lack the knowledge to be able to put a quantum on what is really required, but the sort of figure that CSIRO put forward seems like a good starting point to me. Consider the essential value of having a pollination industry in the country. It would be a small investment in the future. I lack the knowledge of the broader nature of the industry to say how much you could spend and where you could spend it, but undoubtedly we do lack research for protection of the industry and also education, and we need to bring researchers to the industry to look at ways in which we can ensure that we stay as disease free as we possibly can, to enable us to access those international markets, which represent tremendous future opportunities for the economics of the industry. Also, we need to somehow bring new minds to innovation within the industry.

CHAIR—Talking about biosecurity, which you have just raised, would any or all of you like to make a comment with respect to your views on what you see as the main pest threats and disease problems facing the honeybee industry in Tasmania and what we need to do to ensure that we maximise the protection, given that you are an island state and you are at greater risk of an incursion of disease or insect pests than the mainland states? We have a serious problem. We know that it is inevitable that the varroa mite is going to come into this country. What do we need to be doing at the moment to ensure that we get the resources where they are required and give support to some of the very capable scientists that we have in this country to do their business as quickly as possible to ensure that we get maximum protection? What do we need to do and what are the threats that you are concerned about?

Mr Wolfhagen—First off, you mentioned that the prime threat, I believe, is varroa. Already in Tasmania we run a bait hive program and a surveillance hive program as part of the national initiative. For example, our state is largely sponsored by individual beekeepers within our community giving up their time to do that. To me, it is probably the best step that we can take to ensure that we can intercept a swarm of bees coming off a ship. But otherwise we need to keep AQIS up to the mark, to be able to give them the tools and the knowledge.

It was interesting. I was part of a study trip to New Zealand earlier in the year to look at their industry. It was not specifically for varroa, but obviously that was a principal part of it. I brought back a small card, which we call a sticky board, which is put under a hive. A miticide is put in. The mites are killed and drop on the sticky board. You do this card. The card had been sealed in plastic et cetera by Waikato university in New Zealand. I brought it back through Customs and brought it to Customs' attention. The officer that I was dealing with had no knowledge. He was scratching his head and asking around, and one of his colleagues said, 'Oh, that's varroa.' So that said to me that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge within AQIS about that particular pest and what they need to do about it.

We are now on the cusp of the world beekeeping congress Apimondia. It starts next week. People are coming from all over the world. There has been some work done behind the scenes to get AQIS up to the mark on it. Other than that I am not aware of other ways in which Tasmania could protect itself. We have the enviable reputation of being the first and only place, so far, with European wasp and bumblebees so we are at risk as a prime entry point for a foreign pest or disease. The practical work that has already been done has been done in large part by our local department of agriculture, with voluntary involvement from the beekeeping industry. The issue of a bait for the hives has been raised within our forums. This is a pheromone attractant. But they are quite costly. Again within our resources, which are small—as you alluded to earlier, we have a small number of participants—with our current levy system we can only ever raise small amounts of money, so any federal government recognition and assistance that could be rendered would be money well spent.

Mrs Direen—I would strongly support research and development. I think it could be split into two tiers: firstly, to come up with a management plan for prevention and detection of the disease and, secondly, research and development in the area of lessening the incursion if it occurs. We also need to raise the awareness of prevention and detection in the wider community and amongst other stakeholders. I would like an education campaign whereby we educate beekeepers so that we are better able to detect and prevent the diseases and some funds to help us to improve

on the initiatives that we have with the department of primary industry for the detection and prevention of the disease.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think it would be fair to say—and my parliamentary colleagues would probably agree with me—that this inquiry has been educational in itself for people out there in the community because there is now a greater awareness of the honeybee industry than there was prior to this inquiry commencing. On the biosecurity issue that you raised with regard to the sentinel boxes being looked after by volunteers from the honeybee industry, we took evidence about the possible incursion of a hive up in, I think, Cairns. It was a long weekend and the department of primary industry people and the quarantine people were away on a long weekend holiday. An electrician happened to see a swarm of bees and a volunteer went in there to identify and destroy the hive.

Mr ADAMS—A beekeeper, wasn't it?

CHAIR—So we do have a very serious issue and we have an attitude problem on our wharves and at our airports by the Quarantine and Inspection Service itself which needs to be tightened up. We can talk about it and spend money on it, but the reality is that an educational process, as you quite rightly pointed out, needs to be undertaken at all levels. I just want to emphasise the seriousness of some of the problems that we have.

Mr ADAMS—I want to come back to the biosecurity issue of traps. We have taken some evidence on the mainland about using smaller beekeepers, the amateurs in Melbourne and Sydney, to implement some of these traps, mats and things. Maybe we should be giving them some help to cover those things. I would imagine that you would support that sort of initiative, as you have just said. Also the traps around the wharves and the airports can play a role, but they probably do need much more support economically from a national perspective.

Mr Wolfhagen—Provision of more resources will be invaluable. Within the beekeeping industry, you have, as you probably now realise since you have been hearing from a number of us, a fairly passionate bunch of people who are prepared to take up to anybody and everybody the issue of pursuing the best interests of their industry. That is a great asset. Because of the specific knowledge required, it is not within the domain of most people to have an awareness of bees, as we have talked about. The value of the beekeeping industry to the greater community is largely lost unless they have a passion for honey or have some awareness of the value through pollination. That, surprisingly, is widely understood, with country people at least. So, with our biosecurity issue, we can for a relatively small amount of money get a very effective service by recruiting the local beekeepers, but just giving them some more resources would enable them to be much more effective.

CHAIR—In closing, a lot of people outside the industry have to understand that we have a rather unique edge. We do not only show a clean, green image to rest of the world; as far as taste is concerned, we produce honey varieties that people in the rest of the world envy. It is a very good product for us in niche markets right throughout the world, and governments have to understand that, if we produce something that is unique, we should capitalise on it and keep it going.

I thank members of the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association for their attendance here today. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you.

[9.47 am]

BOURKE, Mr Lindsay Jon, President, Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association Inc.

COWEN, Mr Lawrence Jeffery, Executive Member, Apiary Liaison Committee, Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association Inc.

HOSKINSON, Mr Hedley Leyland, Executive Member, Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Could you state the capacity in which you appear before the committee.

Mr Bourke—As well as being President of the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association, I am a former national president of national crop pollination. I represent crop pollinating on AHBIC, the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council. On that board I am national disease chairman and national quarantine chairman.

Mr Hoskinson—I am also president of the southern branch of the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association. I have been doing pollination for longer than any other person in Tasmania.

Mr Cowen—I am a member of the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association, on the committee, and I also represent Pollination on the Apiary Liaison Committee.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament itself. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The committee has received a submission from the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

Mr Bourke—No.

CHAIR—Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or some introductory remarks?

Mr Bourke—Yes. I wrote our submission on behalf of the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association, but because of my national affiliations there are some parts in it about disease prevention and quarantine and also some national issues. I am also vice-president of the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association. There are a couple of things that I would like to tell the committee. One is that leatherwood is vital to our industry for pollinating. Pollinating crops takes a toll on the beehive, and you have to take them to leatherwood to recover. Unlike our mainland counterparts, who have 10 months of honey harvesting, in Tasmania we only have 10 weeks. So we have to get all our honey in 10 weeks, and it is vital that we have enough leatherwood to go to after pollinating. That is a fact; we cannot do it without it.

Our submission also talked about not having people to help the ageing beekeeping population to carry on their business. That is true. This year, I am trying to get a Korean person to come over. Other beekeepers in the state get beekeepers from the Philippines and Europe. We cannot get people from within our own country to help us harvest our crop and to do pollinating. That is why we really need something like what we had in the past at the Hawkesbury college. Waikato university have put in a pretty good submission to AHBIC, and they look like the forerunner to provide a national education facility for us. But one of the problems would be shipping young beekeepers around the country to this college. That would be at a cost. We need to do that. We cannot have it in different centres. We need to have a centre of excellence where we can train people to carry on our business.

Elevation is vital. We have different sites. Some of them are at sea level and have elevation, and they are premium. But if you have a site with one elevation then it will only last three weeks because it is level and the bees cannot get to leatherwood that is flowering later on higher sites. I think I may have been the beekeeper that Hedley was referring to who came back into the industry. I have had sites since 2003 with Forestry on blue gum stands. I have not had one drop of honey from that. It is not Forestry's fault; it is just that they are not reliable. It is not like leatherwood. We know to the date each year that we go to the leatherwood forests when it will yield. Sometimes the yield is better than others, but it will yield. It is reliable for us.

Our submission also talked about amateur beekeepers doing work on the surveillance of hives in the sentinel hive program. That is wonderful, and we take our hats off to them. Animal Health Australia are going to take it over from DAFF in 2008. Part of their submission is to pay the beekeepers up to $1,000 for this service. I think that it is about time that that was done. I think that is really good. With respect to the problem in Cairns, one of the problems is that in Australia—with our surveillance and our fight against disease and incursions—we have the states versus the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth has all the expertise.

A couple of months ago I was at Animal Health Australia's annual meeting, and Stephen Ware from AHBIC and I made a submission to put exotic bees, the Asian honey bee, on the list of the other 64 diseases that we have in Australia. It was a hard task, I can tell you. We had the head vets from all around Australia there, and some of them were speaking against it. We really had to convince and get consensus from everybody in that room. It was difficult, but we did get it and we got it through. So they are now on the list, because they could host varroa destructor.

CHAIR—You have just proven a point that we have picked up in our evidence, that you guys in the honeybee industry are pretty persistent individuals. So well done, to each and every one of you, as far as that is concerned. It is true to say that the states and territories tend to be locking horns with one another rather than addressing the issue—and that does not just cover your industry; it covers many industries. This committee did a very comprehensive investigation on the introduction of feral animals into this country. People forget that animals do not know borders. When human beings start recognising that we will be a lot better off. Mr Ferguson will start the questions.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I want to ask you about the role of commercial pollinating in agriculture. Is the Tasmanian agricultural sector sufficiently aware of the opportunities they have to take full advantage of the services that you can offer? Are you aware of any unexploited opportunities where you could help with yields on farms?

Mr Bourke—Tasmanian crop pollinators are more aware of that than anybody in Australia. We are pioneers. We even have price lists and all sorts of things. We have written a code of practice for our farmers and our seed producers and for ourselves. We are united. We are more than aware of the benefits of crop pollinating for ourselves and for our country.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Do you know what the opportunities might be for people in agriculture here in Tasmania to make better use of your service?

Mr Bourke—We do know for sure that if you pollinate crops you will get a better result and you will get more of it. Tasmania is very proud of the fact that we have the largest germinating rate for canola in the world—up to 98 per cent germination, which is wonderful. One of the reasons is that our hives are so strong. They are much stronger than any other hives in Australia. We do not restrict our hives to a full depth bottom; we aim to have three full depths of brood, which is a huge army. The reason we have large hives is that we go into our short crop, which is the leatherwood, straight afterwards. We need to have a big army of bees to get it quickly, like they used to do in Canada before they got varroa.

Mr Hoskinson—I can elaborate on that. It was stated in one of the submissions that leatherwood honey might be more valuable than feeding it to the bees in the wintertime. But what you have to understand is that we go to the leatherwood, and it is a wonderful crop that yields right up till the autumn and the bees are ready to settle down for the winter. So we go into the winter with a vast amount of young bees, we overwinter our bees and they come out healthy in the springtime, and therefore our hives can go forward more because they have got that abundance of young bees. If you do not have a honeyflow that runs you up to the beginning of the winter your queens stop laying and you will have fewer and fewer young bees going into the wintertime and, as the old bees die, you will come out in the springtime with a lot fewer bees and it will take a lot longer to build them up. So it is because of that honeyflow we get that we go into pollination, as Lindsay was saying, with the best colonies you will get anywhere in Australia.

If you try wintering them out on the east coast, where the queen knocks off a bit after January and they go into the winter, they come out with about that many bees and they take so much longer to build up. Without our leatherwood that runs us into the wintertime, we would not have colonies like we have today. We put fewer colonies in crops to pollinate them than anywhere else, I think, in the world, because of that leatherwood that takes us into the end of the autumn and going into winter with a huge number of young bees. It is more important than the honey that we produce from it or anything that you imagine. I do not know whether you want to question that at all, but that is what I want to put.

CHAIR—We want all we can get from you, warts and all. If you want to make some derogatory comments about people or organisations that you think might assist your industry, that is what this inquiry is all about. I will just ask a general question about pollination, coming in there, because your discussion reminded me that there are people who are in the pollination business on the mainland who cart their bees huge distances, from mid New South Wales up into Queensland. What effect does that have on the mortality rate of bees, and how endemic in the pollination industry in this country is the issue of the destruction of bees by overwork as far as pollination is concerned?

Mr Bourke—You overwork the queens. They are the most important part in the hive, and they are the ones that are under pressure by overpollinating. But if you can replace the queens every one or two years you will have no problems at all. People do transport their bees long distances; there is no doubt about that. I am only a little beekeeper, and I did 72,000 kilometres last year, here in Tasmania, pollinating and going to the west coast. It does not do any harm to the bees while they are being migrated, just as long as it is being done carefully and selectively. In other countries, like America, they even do it in containers. They put them in there to keep them cool because they have to go two or three days.

Yes, it is hard on the bees, because they lose numbers while they are pollinating. That is why we need to get them into the leatherwood to recover, to get them through the winter. I could not get some of my bees away this year because they were pollinating late crops, and they are nowhere near as good as the ones that went to the leatherwood and have come back. At one particular site at Cressy I had 17 hives. They now have 50, as I have put some of the leatherwood hives there for the winter, and we are feeding the 17 hives that were left. The leatherwood honey is vital. It is very good quality, and the pollen is good. You breed superbees, strong bees to get through the winter.

While you are pollinating, some of the late crops are really hard for us to get—you see, we make our honey from beekeeping and we also make some from pollinating, but not as much as we do from the honey harvest. While you are pollinating it is a problem, because sometimes you cannot get them to the leatherwood sites on time. I have a fact sheet here. The hives that I got to the leatherwood before 12 January produced 79 kilograms of honey per hive. The ones that went there from 12 January to 23 January produced 60 kilograms per hive. But the ones that were held back pollinating late crops and went there from 23 January to 26 January only produced 40.2 kilograms per hive. If I had got them all there early, I would have got a lot more honey and more revenue, but you cannot do both.

Mr Hoskinson—I would like to elaborate on that. You asked: does the pollinating do any damage? If you go to early pollination and your old overwintered bees have not reproduced young bees and you put them on early pollination, those old bees only last a very short time, and you end up with virtually no bees, only a few young bees and a small handful of bees covering the brood—the first that have hatched out for that spring. So you can do a huge amount of damage to your hive by overworking them. Old overwintered bees, once they go out in the fieldwork, do not last any time at all. You can damage your bees by putting them to work too soon after the winter.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Are live bee exports something that we in Tasmania do well or is it something that you have identified as an opportunity where we could be better?

Mr Bourke—Thank you for asking me that question. We have a great opportunity here in Tasmania to export packaged bees. In late February and March we have an excess of bees because they breed so well on leatherwood and they are so good. They are fat bees fed on leatherwood pollen and leatherwood honey and we have an excess. Our crop is coming to an end and we have so many bees that they cannot all fit in hives, so we take the honey off and dump the bees out the front and they have to try to get back into the hives. They cannot all get back into the hives, so for a few days they have to camp outside at the front. We have an excess of

good bees which we could earn revenue from. However, we have one problem. We have to tranship them to the mainland to get to America and other countries that desperately need them.

CHAIR—Are telling me that you have to take them from Tasmania to the mainland—

Mr Bourke—To tranship.

CHAIR—Goodness me!

Mr Bourke—We have to do that. We do not have any direct flights. They go in a normal cargo plane, so we have to tranship them. The problem is that we have a pest that is all over the world but is not on mainland Australia called the Braula fly. It is a little six-legged fly that runs around in our hives, the same as it does all over the world except on mainland Australia. There are ways we could deal with it. We could net it and we could make sure that the transhipping changeover is done at night when there would not be any, but we would need some help to do that.

CHAIR—How does the Braula fly affect your ability to export bees? What does it do? Does it attach eggs to the bees or does it get in with the bees? Is it small? Tell us about it, because this is the first time we have heard about it.

Mr Bourke—Because only Tasmania has Braula fly. You would not have heard about it from the mainlanders.

CHAIR—That is why we need to know about it.

Mr Bourke—They do not want it and we do not want to give it to them either.

Mr ADAMS—How does that affect the shipping?

Mr Bourke—It affects the shipping because they are desperately afraid that it might jump onto their bees.

Mr ADAMS—So they are saying no?

Mr Bourke—They are saying no. We are asked our DPI to talk with people there, but we are not having much luck. We need to do this quickly because we are all ready to do it. We can send many thousands of packaged bees away.

CHAIR—What does it actually do? How does it—

Mr Bourke—It is just a pest.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Is it a parasite?

Mr Bourke—It is on the bee—

Mr Hoskinson—No, it is not parasite at all. A parasite sucks the blood out of something.

CHAIR—What does this thing do?

Mr Hoskinson—All it does is ride on the back of the bee and, when bees are transferring nectar from one bee to another, it will nip down and pinch a bit off the tongue of the other bee. It is not a parasite at all. The only damage they are frightened of is if a colony collapses. Have you heard of colony collapse disorder? If a colony goes backwards very fast, the bees go out but the mites stay behind and a lot of them will get on the queen bee and that reduces her capacity to lay until the colony picks up again and the mites—

CHAIR—How do you get rid of it?

Mr Bourke—I have that problem at the moment. We have a thing called the Australian queen bee breeding program and I have bees here to assess. When I send the queens back, I could have Braula fly on them. They will drop off the bees if you use nicotine, so tobacco smoke would dislodge them. You cannot get rid of them.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—So you simply cannot ship any bees to the mainland at all?

Mr Bourke—No.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Equally so, you cannot use the mainland as a stopover.

Mr Bourke—Unless we have a quarantine station. They can go to a quarantine station and be checked before going further.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—So there would potentially be some good income from being able to export these bees?

Mr Bourke—A very good income for all Tasmanian beekeepers.

CHAIR—If you had the capacity to ship them out of Tasmania and you did not have to go to the mainland, it would not be a problem—is that what you are saying?

Mr Bourke—Yes.

Mr Hoskinson—We do not have that capacity.

Mr Bourke—Because it would have to be on overseas airlines.

Mr Hoskinson—If we had the capacity, we would not have the time to assemble quickly the amount that you would have to have for one aircraft here to fly out direct to America or wherever it was going. We would not have the time to assemble those bees, in my opinion.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Are you saying that, if there were a protocol available to you that could give biosecurity to the mainland states, it would be a huge advantage to you?

Mr Bourke—Yes, it would be.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—That is really the point, isn't it?

Mr Bourke—Yes.

CHAIR—It is not likely to occur, because it sends a message out of the mainland that we are going to compromise our border security. We will have pressure from the New Zealanders, and we have enough pressure with fire blight now. We will have all those sorts of pressures coming offshore to us. I do not think you would ever get to that position, to be quite frank with you. I have to say to you, with due respect to the Tasmanians, that I would not be in agreement with any movement that would compromise our ability to stop pests or diseases coming into the mainland.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Is it so that you are talking about exporting bees to other nations where they have the same pest, in which case they are not as concerned about receiving—

Mr Bourke—They are not concerned about that at all.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—It is simply the mainland states that present you with the difficulty.

Mr Bourke—In the transhipping. That is two hours on the tarmac at night, heavily netted.

CHAIR—There is a huge export market for honey bees offshore. The classic example that you all know is California, where they have massive problems with bee numbers. We have a niche market there. You will be interested to know that I was in Saudi Arabia, and they actually import bees from the mainland as well. They have no trees or anything growing, but they must have pockets of them somewhere to be importing bees.

Mr ADAMS—I just want to come back to pollination. Tasmania is continuing to grow a reputation for seed production in our growing horticulture industries. We see the Murray-Darling becoming less and less important for food production—fruit and vegetables—in the future. Other areas of Australia are being looked at. If we can get our water production right there will probably be an increase in that area. Look at seed production through the Coal River valley. Do we have an agreement with the farmers federation, the TFGA, in relation to pollination services? We have received evidence that there needs to be new knowledge from the beekeepers' point of view of what the farmer needs and what the horticulturist needs and the need for the farmers—and their neighbours, to some degree—to know what the beekeepers' needs are, such as no spraying during pollination. How advanced are we in Tasmania in that area?

Mr Bourke—Not very well, apart from this booklet which we freely give out. I do address the seed companies, but we have not gone very far with the farmers. We do have lots of problems with them.

Mr ADAMS—So do you need material there, more opportunities to grow that? We need protocols and we need to get agreements?

Mr Bourke—Definitely, because we can be pollinating one seed crop, and not far away could be potatoes, for instance. It might not be insecticides that they are spraying, but they use water softeners, which will damage our hives. It is like running a gauntlet. It is very difficult to crop-pollinate, because of the sprays.

Mr ADAMS—I understand that, but that can only be overcome by people's knowledge of everybody's needs.

Mr Bourke—Definitely. The seed companies are well aware of it. They spray their crops before we go in. They would like us to get out there as soon as the job is done so that they can spray them again. This last season was particularly bad.

CHAIR—Isn't that a significant factor for CCD?

Mr Bourke—CCD is caused by a variety of things. We do have nosema, which is a dysentery, and when bees are stressed they can get this. Everything that I have read overseas in the past with CCD is that it is the Asian variety of nosema—nosema ceranae—which our European honey bee has not got much resistance to. But it is a combination of things: it is varroa, old bees coming into the spring and nosema ceranae, and that causes the problem.

CHAIR—I have heard some evidence or read somewhere of an instance of autopsies taken on bees that showed that their bodies were saturated with a huge variety of diseases. Can you make any comment on that.

Mr Bourke—Yes, I can. Dr Denis Anderson went to America recently and had a look at some of these sites that had been labelled with CCD. He came up with the same conclusion: they had a variety of things wrong with them—not all were CCD. There were other diseases as well. Quite often a queen bee will run out of sperm and she becomes a drone layer and the colony is doomed from that. If it happens in early spring, they cannot get a replacement and they die out. That is attributed to CCD as well, as far as Dr Denis Anderson found over there.

CHAIR—We could safely conclude that chemicals and insecticides are playing a significant role in the decimation of the honeybee population offshore, but not so much in Australia at the moment because of the way in which we handle them.

Mr Bourke—It happens here in Australia too because every seed that is sown is soaked in insecticide, which goes up through the plant. It is very harmful for the bees. They get disorientated and fly to the wrong hives. They become aggressive. It is really hard for them. We can only recover them by putting them on a good honeyflow afterwards.

CHAIR—That is interesting.

Mr Bourke—It stays in the soil as well.

Mr Hoskinson—It comes up in the next crop.

Mr Bourke—It can come up for two or three years and can even be more strong in plants that do not need it. For instance, it is in the canola seed and that is for one harvest. Then it is rotated

and you could have clover on there for the next two or three years. It will come up into the clover as well. So we get it from below and above.

Mr Hoskinson—You can go on to this colony collapse disease. It has happened to me twice in my lifetime but I have not got time to tell you about it. It happens from time to time because of the conditions and what you do to your bees. It is a variation. It is the world we now find ourselves in with the beekeeping industries. Throughout the world we have not really been considered in anything because nobody recognised the value of our industry. We have been ignored as far as sprays are concerned and our resources are gone.

CHAIR—I think they are getting to understand it now because of the significant publicity this committee has been able to generate.

Mr Hoskinson—They are starting to understand it now. It has contributed. It is the position we find ourselves in today.

CHAIR—You have just been taken for granted, as you have quite rightly pointed out. In the politics that operate outside of our profession, you have been insignificant in terms of the noise that you have been able to generate in the minds of the people who have been your main opponents in getting some recognition. That is particularly so of the environmental movement. It is absolutely disgraceful to see that they are working with governments to lock you out of public lands. Legislation has been introduced into Queensland to protect what—a non-science based view that honey bees have an impact on native bees when they are cohabitants? I am a novice in the game, but I have been listening to the evidence presented to this committee and I have read a little bit and I think it is just scandalous what is happening. When you think that 70 per cent of the honey that is produced in Queensland, similarly to what is produced in Tasmania, is coming from native flora not other sources it is amazing.

Mr Bourke—Eighty per cent of all honey produced in Australia comes from the eucalypt forests. I think it is disgraceful what the Beattie government has done to the working beekeepers in that state. I would like to say that we in the beekeeping community are very concerned about the delegates coming for Apimondia in September. There will be over 1,000 beekeepers coming from other countries. Beekeeping is active in those countries and beekeepers being beekeepers they will look at their hives before they come on their holiday to Australia. Varroa has a habit of being transported from colony to colony on beekeepers' clothing. It can live up to five days on beekeepers' clothing. We were very concerned about this. I have spoken to authorities and Mr McGauran has given me a letter saying that they are going to inspect all the delegates coming to Apimondia closely, which is very good because it could be in their clothing. So that is going to happen. Also we are very concerned about losing our quarantine station at Eastern Creek. You must have heard this throughout Australia.

CHAIR—We are well aware of that and we are lobbying rigorously on your behalf on that.

Mr Bourke—That is good. A few months ago we had a honeybee industry linkages workshop. I suppose you are well aware of that too. Out of that Mr McGauran has given us money to do research. That is the DAFF pollinating Australia project, and I am very proud to say that I am on that committee along with seven other people.

CHAIR—That is pleasing to hear. We are quite proud of the fact that, through the secretariat and the evidence that we have received, we have been able to generate a bit of appreciation of how important the honeybee industry is. We believe that it is our work that generated the money that came from the minister to put into that committee. We are very pleased to say that we did an inquiry into rural skill shortages and that is why we decided to undertake this inquiry into the honeybee industry. It was centred around the Eastern Creek facility and how it was going to be shut down because there was no further need for it. So I suppose in many respects the industry working with us, and us working with the industry—and the way we have gone about advertising this through the secretariat—has certainly bought some significant benefits. That is due to a great extent to my parliamentary colleagues on this committee.

Mr Bourke—We love our country and we want to make it wealthy. With agriculture, you did comment earlier that we directly produce about $1.7 billion of income a year. But when you include crops like lucerne, clovers and all those sorts of things then it is actually $3.8 billion.

CHAIR—Yes, that is right.

Mr Bourke—So it is vital. In fact in Australia and throughout the world the honey bee is the most important animal on the planet. You can do without any of the others, but you cannot do without the bees.

CHAIR—The Europeans in particular are envious of our yields over here. I was interested to talk with some German parliamentarians the other day. They do not have our honey bees in Europe and they cannot understand why our yields are higher.

Mr ADAMS—This is one of the issues—and selling our honey to Europe in 44-gallon drums is probably not the best way of doing it when we can add value enormously. I am sure the industry knows all about that. Your submission highlights the problems of American foulbrood and the real difficulty that that poses for us. Can we use antibiotics in the control of that? In Tasmania, how are we going with the control of that?

Mr Bourke—Tasmania, unlike the rest of Australia, has legislated to freely use OTC in the treatment of foulbrood. Yes, you can do it if you do it properly, and Australians are some of the best beekeepers—in fact, they are the best—in the world. We have very good standards. We have a 60-day stand-down from using OTCs before the first crop comes in. We are fortunate that we have four distinct seasons, so we can do this. It is possible for Tasmanian beekeepers to treat their hives with OTC and to have it completely out of the system before we get our first crop of honey. It is a little bit harder on the mainland, where you have honey trickling in for 10 months of the year, but we can clearly do this. We have had tests and things to show that it is not in our product. We do that regularly, so we are very clean.

In fact, Australia is missing out on a vitally important thing, and that is that we are clean and green. We do not have to use chemicals to treat our hives for varroa. For how long that will be, I do not know, but we are missing out on this. We have the cleanest hives and honey in the whole world. In fact, three commercial beekeepers—can you imagine that—are now classified as organic for leatherwood. In my report last year I said, as is my belief, that all of our eucalypt honey could be organic. It is in the eucalypt forests. That is a vital selling tool. Australia should

be capitalising on that. Honey in Australia is not a world commodity. Our honey is vastly superior to anything else.

Mr ADAMS—There are two opportunities for new products then: from the beverage side through to the medicine side. These seem to be underdone from an industry point of view. Although the small niche products exist, there do not seem to be new initiatives really getting in there. Do I have that right, or has there been some change?

Mr Bourke—You have got it right. If only we could take a leaf from the New Zealanders. They are masters at—

Mr ADAMS—Adding value?

Mr Bourke—Adding value. Unfortunately, Medihoney has been sold to the New Zealanders too, so we have lost that. But we do produce honey that has those properties throughout Australia, and you could still do it. There are other things too to add on value. A lot of us do it. As you mentioned earlier, if you export a beautiful honey like leatherwood with a lot of strength in 44-gallon drums for somebody to take and add two or three drums of some insignificant, tasteless muck to it, it still comes out at the other end as leatherwood.

Mr ADAMS—Are you talking about Europeans?

Mr Bourke—We are losing something there. We have four packers in the state and a few smaller packers, which is really good. We could pack more of it. With Julian and the rest of the TBA, we are working on something to get an appellation for our leatherwood honey. We are sending a lot of samples away this year to have them analysed and put into a group so that we can get that appellation. That will be a good marketing tool. We need every marketing tool that we can get, and diversifying is one way to do it.

CHAIR—I thank the members of the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association for your attendance today. It is appreciated. This committee depends very much on the evidence that it receives from its witnesses to be able to put together a report that can influence the government of the day to address the issue and put the funds needed into the industry to keep it going.

Proceedings suspended from 10.29 am to 10.45 am

BOURKE, Mr Lindsay Jon, Member, Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania

EWINGTON, Mr Peter John, Apiary Representative, Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania

RILEY, Mr Sean Patrick, General Manager, Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania

WILLMOTT, Mr Des, Beekeeper Member, Apiary Working Group, Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania

SARGISON, Mr Graham John, Manager Field Services, Forestry Tasmania

WOLFHAGEN, Mr Julian Mark, President, Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Wolfhagen—I am a member of the apiary working party.

Mr Bourke—I am the President of the Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association Inc.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath I advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The committee has received a submission from the Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

Mr Riley—No, there are none.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document tabled by the Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry?

Mr ADAMS—I so move.

CHAIR—There being no objection, it is so ordered. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or some introductory remarks?

Mr Riley—I will make some introductory remarks to give some background. Thank you to the rest of the members of the apiary working party for coming to assist with this presentation. The FFIC of Tasmania represents the broad cross-section of forestry related interests, including forest workers, contractors, sawmillers, beekeepers, local government, Indigenous groups, recreational users, furniture manufacturers, timber companies, private forest growers and farmers, as well as Forestry Tasmania and the state government. Collectively, the forest industry council contributes to Tasmania's forest industry through its many varied functions and activities

and through the role it plays in strengthening the cooperative relationships and communication processes with all of its member organisations.

In terms of this inquiry, the FFIC's submission is confined to land use and licensing aspects and does not attempt to address issues of quarantine or hive and disease management contained in the terms of reference for this inquiry. I would like to show particular appreciation for the work undertaken by Trevor Bird in preparing this submission. Trevor is unable to be here today because he is Western Australia. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of this group because, largely, a lot of the work in the submission relates to a number of meetings—in my experience—since around July 2005. We have met around 10 times since that time.

Briefly, I would like to raise some of the critical events that have allowed this apiary working party to work constructively in developing a plan for moving forward with more effective management arrangements. I have tendered the *Tasmanian apiary industry profile* and it provides a very good picture. It was commissioned by the FFIC in around 2004. It provides a good picture of the industry structure and some of the socioeconomic issues facing the industry in Tasmania. As I mentioned earlier, we have also held regular apiary working party meetings and it has worked at fostering really good relationships between the beekeeping industry, Forestry Tasmania and the FFIC.

In recent times the FFIC has been attending the TBA annual general meetings. We have found that to be a really good way of developing relationships with beekeepers who are not necessarily represented on this working party. More recent meetings have involved beekeepers and Forestry Tasmania operational staff. This has led to a better system of classification of sites within state forests based on capacity for hives, productivity and security from the impacts of forestry operations. This has relied on effective relationships with district foresters and beekeepers alike. I would also like to mention that in recent times there has been an emerging culture within Forestry Tasmania regarding leatherwood retention through the variable retention strategies.

CHAIR—Does anybody else want to make an observation or a statement?

Mr Sargison—Forestry Tasmania did not put in a submission specifically from our own body, but we have contributed to the working group. I have also joined Mr Robin Thompson on the industry liaison committee, and I would like to appear with them later. I would like to make a few comments from the point of view of Forestry Tasmania. Forestry Tasmania does have a very good working relationship with most of the state's beekeepers. We signed a Community Forest Agreement with them in November 2000. Part of that agreement contained some guidelines by which we manage beekeeping on state forests and it includes mostly the protection of the leatherwood-rich forest.

As you know, we have a very rigid planning scheme for forestry. When all of our planners are planning for harvesting they take into account what we call special management zones specifically for apiary, which surround every beehive site on state forests. So every planner, when they are planing a harvesting operation within an apiary protection area, knows that it will come up flagged for special management. So they know they have to take special account of any leatherwood-rich forest in that zone. That is not to say they protect every tree, but they try to protect the leatherwood-rich areas and streamside reserves; they amend boundaries to try to protect it.

But, as we have heard already, there are some 777,000 hectares of leatherwood-rich forest in this state and only 260,000 of those are on state forest. The formal reserve system has expanded fourfold over the past four decades so a lot of that leatherwood-rich forest has been placed in reserves. The beekeepers access multiple state forests via our network of forestry roads free of charge. They have been built by the timber industry. So we have contributed towards the growth of the leatherwood honey industry by making more hive sites available during the last decade.

CHAIR—What is the emphasis on beekeepers being able to access forest through forestry-built roads? Foresters are able to access forests through taxpayer-funded roads. What is the emphasis?

Mr Sargison—That is not correct, Mr Chairman. The forest industry pays for the forest roads on the state forest.

CHAIR—Yes, but I want to know what the emphasis was in relation to beekeepers being able to access the forest through those roads.

Mr Sargison—If they were a timber company, they would be paying a road toll. The beekeepers do not pay a road toll for the use of those roads; they are able to access these sites without any toll.

Under the timber Community Forest Agreement there was a package to assist particularly the special species timber industry. Specifically, $3 million was set aside for roading into special timbers management units. So it was nothing to do with individual coupes. I think that may have confused the issue before. This package was specifically for roading into special species timber management areas and as such they will be managed on a very long-term rotation—something like 200 years. So if they are accessing that type of timber then it is highly likely that they will contain leatherwood-rich forests which will be available to the beekeepers.

On top of that, there was a provision in the timber community forest agreement for some research into leatherwood. To elaborate on that, the community forest agreement research program allocated $30,000 to research the implications for the leatherwood resource from the new management of old-growth forests. This project seeks to spatially estimate the leatherwood resource and investigate the implications for nectar supply from the expanded reserve system and the shift to variable retention—we are moving away from clear-felling to variable retention. As the members of the TBA were saying before, currently our management of leatherwood-rich forests has been on a modelled basis. I think with this research we will be able to be far more specific in knowing precisely what resource is available. So I think it is a real positive coming out of the Tasmanian forest community funds.

That is probably the majority of all I have to say. Most other things have been covered except that by 2010 we will have moved away from clear-felling by something like 80 per cent. I think moving towards this variable retention harvesting of old-growth forest will be of great benefit to the beekeeping industry and to the protection of leatherwood.

Mr Willmott—I would like to address two points. One, significant emphasis has been placed upon the increased reservation of crown lands or land that was previously accessible for forestry for timber production. For the majority of the apiary sites that are in those areas that are now

being protected our access has been retained. There are some that have been lost through road closures and bridges falling, but the previous access, in most cases, is still there. The equation may give an incorrect picture of what access we do actually have. Two, with the emphasis on the reduction of clear-felling to 20 per cent, the problem with that 20 per cent will be predominantly cable-logging activities in steep country. Unfortunately, a lot of that country in the past—and I dare say in the future—is highly valued by the beekeeping industry because of the significant presence of leatherwood. Unfortunately, the past and current management practices for cable logging do not allow for the retention of leatherwood.

CHAIR—I am conscious of the fact that it is a very political issue, and we are not in the business of having an inquiry into the timber industry, the logging industry or any industry other than the honeybee industry. But I take the point that, despite what is being said, the resource that you need—that is, the leatherwood tree itself—is creating and will continue to create problems for the honeybee industry in Tasmania. I just want to make the point that I do not want to focus on the timber industry. We want to focus on what the problems are for the honeybee industry and how we can overcome those problems through this inquiry. I can assure you that we will not be making recommendations on the basis of what is occurring politically in the forest industry. We will be making recommendations on the basis of what is restricting the viability of the honeybee industry. I make that point for what it is worth.

Mr ADAMS—Seventy per cent of honey production comes from native resources—from our native forests and I guess conservation areas as well. In relation to access to this resource, and we were just talking about leatherwood and the importance of leatherwood, are we giving enough emphasis to what leatherwood means as a species to Tasmania? We have this unique honey and we have a unique icon, but we need to have a focus on leatherwood because that is where it comes from. We are certainly changing the way that forestry is operated, from old clear-felling through to—I do not know what we are calling it now—

Mr Sargison—Variable retention.

Mr ADAMS—Variable retention. We get different terms, but I think we understand where we are going with that. All of you work in this Tasmanian area and you have come together in the body that you are in. How do we find a situation where we maintain as much leatherwood as we possibly can through the forestry process and also give access to that for the beekeepers?

Mr Ewington—When I was on the FFIC I did a tour of the southern forest with David Farrow, who is a forester down there. We looked at the Weld, the Arve and the Picton. He described what was going to happen in the future. He showed me areas that are being harvested at the moment and that were being planned to be harvested. There are seven criteria in the planning scheme, which include leatherwood. No. 7 is leatherwood. What he showed us in the Weld Valley is future roading. They would take a loop and they would go over the Weld River and make new areas of leatherwood available to the beekeepers. This is in the hunt for specialty timbers, so this is not a short-term view; this is a long-term view.

In the Arve they are looking at putting fingers out towards parks, which will bring the parks' leatherwood an inch closer, but in the hunt for specialty timbers they will only take the specialty timber out, which will leave the majority of the leatherwood and allow beekeepers access to that leatherwood. It is the same in the Picton.

There is cable logging in AR034C, which I went to with Sean, FFIC general council and the planners. He demonstrated to us how he was going to save the leatherwood. Okay, he did not save every tree, but you could see wrapped all around this coupe is the old clear-fell. There is nothing left. There is a little bit of upstream side reserve. In this new coupe a lot of leatherwood is left, especially counting the other six criteria of the plan. One of the six criteria of the planning scheme is the total saving of class 4 streams. Before, they were allowed to take the big trees out et cetera. Now that is banned. That saves a lot of leatherwood. So the future as I see it for the leatherwood industry is assured. We are not going to grow what we have in the past—that is gone—but what we have now is assured.

Our biggest problem—and it has struck us these last few weeks—is the ageing forestry road structure. On Rubber Road there are three sites and 150 hives. Over the other side of that is a log bridge—I think it is Big Creek. The centre log on that bridge has gone. It is a 25 or 30m long log bridge. They will not be opening that country up again for logging for 20 or 30 years. Ken Nichols told me, 'We will put it in the budget.' If it is not repaired this year, it means a reduction of access to 150 hives.

CHAIR—You are saying that it is not so much the access to the resource itself, which is the leatherwood tree, that is going to be a problem in the future. You think that is being handled reasonably with cooperation between the parties. You are saying that the access is going to be restricted because of the state of the roads and the infrastructure on those roads.

Mr Ewington—There is more pain as far as we are concerned. On Wednesday we will be taking the excavator out onto two roads to clear the road surface of two mudslides so that we can get through and get our bees out. On one road the culverts have got to be replaced totally. They are old log culverts so they would be very deep. Until they do that, mudslides will be sitting up there for another heavy rainfall to wash them over the road again and make the road impassable. One road is the access to 600 hives and the other one to 200. Also on the eastern side of Savage River reserve is the Arthur River. The Farquhar Bridge and the Hilder Bridge are gone. They have not been used for quite a while, but if those two bridges were renewed there would be instant access, with a little bit of roadwork, to 1,000 hives.

CHAIR—These bridges are in state forests, so they are in government hands.

Mr Ewington—Yes. It is going to be 20 or 30 years before forestry will be logging over on the eastern side of the Arthur, and if it is not profitable to put those bridges across then, the access to that leatherwood will be lost forever.

CHAIR—Has anybody been able to put a percentage figure on the amount of honey that you would harvest from that source? What percentage of the total 70 or 80 per cent that you get out of the leatherwood industry is in that area?

Mr Bourke—I would like to answer that question. This year we had a severe drought. The official records say 70 per cent of our harvest. This year it was 90 per cent. Ninety per cent of our harvest of honey this year was leatherwood, and without the leatherwood this industry would be finished. It is vital. I am one of the beekeepers over one of the bridges that Peter was talking about. We need forestry to look after them on our behalf.

CHAIR—What percentage of your total production of leatherwood honey does the area that is affected by the bridge infrastructure make up?

Mr Ewington—The Farquhar Bridge and the bridge over the Keith have excellent potential for 600 hives. The bridges over the Hilder and over the Keith on that side would allow you to process right through to the pipeline—untold numbers. These are good production areas. They are not areas of short production. They are top quality production areas with large gullies and large reserves which produce a lot of honey.

Mr Wolfhagen—I will come back to Mr Adams's question. One of the core issues in the broader sense is that in the state we have an issue that forestry at times does not necessarily see itself constitutionally as responsible for agriculture. We have been told this in the past. I appreciate the work and the communication that has happened, but structurally there is an issue that their remit does not, I believe, cover the responsibility that they have to our industry in a holistic sense.

Mr Sargison—I would also like to respond to Mr Adams's question. It is all down to the value. From our point of view, forestry gets returns from the timber industry of about $50 million. Our return from the beekeeping industry is $30,000 a year. So when it comes to management we try to do our best but, as Julian says, we are there to manage the forest for all its values. My concern is that the true value is not placed on the pollination services. If the true value of pollination services was recognised that could be reflected right back through the chain and we could all get a reasonable return. After all, forestry is a business.

Mr ADAMS—We have to build the chain. We have heard that the Farmers Federation is not really on side and we have a lot more to do in that direction. There was some money in the community for roads.

Mr Sargison—Yes, $3 million.

Mr ADAMS—We are not going to fix a bridge for that.

Mr Sargison—As I said earlier, we are building 80 kilometres of roads into these special timber management units, to be managed on a long-term basis. That was to access new sites. Unfortunately we lost three bridges in the north-west in this last flood.

Mr Ewington—Four.

Mr Sargison—Sorry, I stand corrected. That will be in addition; it will be a separate issue.

Mr ADAMS—I understand the economics of all that.

CHAIR—Mr Willmott wanted to make a comment. I will just make a point that was just put to me. We appear to be in a situation where this group is being split up into components. That is what I was concerned about when I made the comments about not wanting this to be a forestry industry issue. I want to find out what you, collectively as a group, are doing positively for the honeybee industry.

Mr Willmott—I apologise if we are coming across as being fragmented. My colleagues and my colleagues' comments are predominantly trying to get to you the message that we are working with the forests and the forest industries. We are frustrated with the lack of significant regulatory outcomes. I would like to follow up on Mr Adams's point on pollination afterwards, but I would like to give you my personal experience. Some five or six years ago we—a group of beekeepers here in Launceston—were allocated access to an area on the Hellyer River, which had the capacity of 100 hives. The year that we were granted that access we had one-in-a-hundred-year floods. Most of us had bees in there but the access was lost because old log culverts were washed away and the road collapsed. As a result of that we, as individuals, undertook to re-establish the access. That has cost us in the order of $20,000 over five years. The majority of it was up front. As part of that $20,000 some $3,000 to $3,500 was given by forestry in kind, by way of pipes, road-making and road-repairing materials and the like. That was significant. Out of the 100-hive capacity we get, on average, seven tonnes a year. At today's wholesale rate that is about $21,000. As a group of beekeepers we believe that that was a fair investment.

CHAIR—Let me assure you that we understand, as far as the honeybee industry is concerned, after the evidence that we have taken out in the field and in the parliament, that there are a significant number of industries out there in the community that take the honeybee industry for granted. Let me also emphasise to you that we are fully aware of the incapacity of the honeybee industry, because of the relatively small income that it generates within itself, to tackle some of the issues that it needs to tackle, such as research and development and the types of things that you are talking about, without the assistance of some of these outside industries that are beneficiaries of the pollination process that comes out of the honeybee industry.

The point I am making is that industries have to understand—and I think they are starting to understand—the significant contribution made to the economy of this country through the honeybee industry. It is the purpose of this inquiry to find out not only what the problems are within the industry and what the benefits are of the industry as a whole to the community at large but, more importantly, what we can do to assist the industry to remain viable, given that it is also facing incursion threats such as the varroa mite, which has the potential to create massive problems not only for the honeybee industry but for agriculture and horticulture as a whole. So it is very important that we hear the concerns of people, warts and all, but people need to understand that, in taking that evidence, we want to hear evidence that is going to assist us to convince the world at large, if I could put it that way, about the significant importance of the honeybee industry to the economy of this country.

You cannot get away from the fact that, regardless of what you do with the figures, the by-products of honey bees contribute about $2 billion to the economy of this country. People have to understand it. It does not matter whether it is in fruit crops, grain crops, oilseed crops or timber; it makes a significant contribution. We are getting that message loud and clear, and we want to know what we can do as a committee to help all industries be the beneficiaries of what is regarded in many people's eyes as a very insignificant industry in this country, when in reality it is the exact opposite.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—First of all, I ask you to forgive my ignorance. I wonder if one of you would be able to just outline the nature of the leatherwood tree as it relates to forestry, whether or not it is prized as a species of itself, and, if it is, whether you are concerned

for access to leatherwood because it is collateral damage in a forestry operation. I might go there first.

Mr Sargison—Maybe I could answer that from a forest point of view—

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Yes, that would be good.

Mr Sargison—and then hand over to the beekeepers.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I am just looking for a brief outline.

Mr Sargison—It is a rainforest species which tends to be a subdominant tree in the native forests, in wet areas particularly, so it forms the understorey with blackwood, myrtle and other native forest species. We do have a special-timbers industry which is interested in those and values those special timbers in their own right. Leatherwood is one of those. Probably it would not be the most highly prized compared with blackwood, myrtle and others, but it is in that group.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Is it used for furniture making, for example?

Mr Sargison—I believe in a minority, fairly limited way, yes.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Where you were having a forestry operation, would a lot of it perhaps, let us say, go into chip?

Mr Sargison—Yes, some does, but it is certainly not sought after.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—If you had a very mature one, you might take that to a sawmill?

Mr Sargison—What tends to happen is that they form pockets in the old-growth forest. We are not targeting special-species timber-rich areas. We tend to not want to target those, because, as I said, they are not a prized species in the sawmilling industry or the woodchipping industry. So we are not targeting leatherwood, but, where it has spread throughout the harvesting area, it is collateral damage, if you like, and it does get harvested. But we try and contain it in the streamside reserves, where it tends to predominate, in those wetter areas. If we can design the coupe boundary to exclude those special-species areas, that is what we will do.

Mr Wolfhagen—I would add to that, as you have heard, it is a rainforest species. It tends to be of an understorey nature, particularly in the developing rainforest. There are three stages of rainforest, from the developing rainforest through to the mature rainforest. In the mature rainforest you do not see eucalypts. Fortunately, a lot of the central-western part of Tasmania has that, therefore it does not have the logging pressure because it does not have this big volume of eucalypts. So you have this callidendrous forest which is made up of purely rainforest species, and in those areas the leatherwoods are relatively unaffected by the logging. It is only particularly in the southern forest, where it is still not callidendrous but developed intricate forest, that you have these big eucalypts that overstand. These trees get up to approximately 100 metres tall. Underneath you have this understorey of which leatherwoods are a component. That

is where they do suffer collateral damage. With this aggregated, retentional small group, they are able to go in and get the bigger stands of eucalypts out, causing minimal surrounding damage. That is what we, from a beekeeping perspective, are particularly keen to see; we are keen to see that move away.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I have three other questions, although the chair might want to share the call around. I wonder if there is an underlying issue here as to our attitude in trying to come to a mixed-use forest. Is there a mismatch between the two interests in the sense that beekeepers are wanting to go in on an annual basis and on an ongoing basis whereas forestry operations are more likely to show more of an intensive use of a particular forest, say, every 20 or 30 years?

Mr Sargison—Yes, that is going to be the case because we are tending towards a regrowth forest. For instance, if the pulp mill gets up, we will be harvesting regrowth forests for that mill. Those regrowth forests will be turned over on a 30-year or 40-year basis. Although leatherwood regenerates as part of our natural process, it will not flourish in that sort of environment. It is only really going to be in these longer term—

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—mature forests.

Mr Sargison—Yes, that is correct. We have had that old-growth managed, as Julian has said, on a variable retention basis, but that will be on a longer term rotation. That is where the future of the leatherwood honey industry will be.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—The key issue is getting access to it, so I am wondering, if you are actually moving away from harvesting in mature forests, whether you are in fact reducing the likelihood that road infrastructure and bridges will be there for beekeepers. What I am saying is this: perversely, is it the case that by having less harvesting in mature forest you are in fact making it harder for beekeepers?

Mr Wolfhagen—I believe that the roading system within state forests is pretty mature. There are not huge tracts of state forests that are not already somehow accessed by some form of roading. A lot of the special-timbers roading that we are talking about is really just sneaking up a gully. As I referred to earlier, some of those areas are in fact already overflown by the bees. So I believe there is not the potential within state forests for significant new roading to therefore increase significantly the production.

If you look at the final page of our submission, you will see that, while there is a propensity of hives sitting on forestry land, they tend to be around the fringes, so the bees are flying and visiting leatherwood within the remnant portions of state forests. Most of them are flying over the boundary into reserved areas. The majority of the honey is coming from reserve lands, but the hives are actually sitting on state forests.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—My last question is—and the answer will probably be a straight no, but I will ask it anyway—is there any scope for beekeepers to be getting nectar from plantation species?

Mr Wolfhagen—No.

Mr ADAMS—It is a young crop and they do not flower—

Mr Sargison—If you are meaning eucalypt plantations, it is virtually not going to happen. If you are referring to leatherwood plantations, that has been tried but has been unsuccessful.

Mr Wolfhagen—The leatherwood really does not start to produce significantly in a nectar sense until it is in excess of 200 years old perhaps—that is an arbitrary figure. The rotations that commercial forestry is talking about are never going to allow it to amount to anything. All the new species of eucalypt grow so damn fast that nothing can keep up with them anyway so they soon shadow everything out, so it is of no benefit.

CHAIR—I want to ask some questions centred around trade issues. Quite obviously, you have worked very well and cooperatively in your submission to address many of the issues, but on page 26 of your submission you say:

In this analysis Tasmanian operators appear to fare better than counterparts in other States, their average price of $3,40 per kilo was almost double the national wholesale honey value ($1.80) and they may well have more robust businesses ... the national average position appears to unsustainable.

How will a single desk marketing system assist the honeybee industry in Tasmania? How do you anticipate a single desk would be established and run? We are interested in the single desk concept because we have been going through a very interesting debate on single desk in some other agricultural commodities recently.

Mr Wolfhagen—It is a concept that works in an ideal world. We see the benefits of it. Your question is quite long in a sense that historically Tasmania has with its leatherwood been able to achieve a better return for its honey. It has also had coupled with that more individual producer-cum-marketers whereas the mainland of Australia tends to have a farmer-producer base selling their honey through packing houses—I think 80 per cent at one point went through one packing house. So the motivations and the aspirations are governed by one organisation in a sense whereas in Tasmania there is healthy competition even though we are a small number. Most of us sell our honey directly to a customer rather than on to a packing house.

The concept of single desk marketing was looking at a way that we could add to the advantages of the brand ‘Tasmania’ and the brand ‘leatherwood’ by stopping some of the leakage, if you like, of leatherwood into cheaper markets or processor markets. So it would be a way that we could control the total production on an annual basis.

CHAIR—I suggest that the ‘single desk marketing system’ were words from your submission, not from me. I think it is wording that you really should move away from because it has a smell about it. You should concentrate on what you have in this state—an iconic brand of honey. I love your leatherwood honey. Your local members give me jars of it every now and then because they know I eat it, use it in cooking and so forth. You do have a unique product in this state that nowhere else in the world, including the Australian mainland, can emulate. You have a pretty fair challenge ahead of you to make sure that you grab a niche market in the world. There is no doubt you will do that because it is obvious that you are, despite my earlier comments, working together to try to get a solid outcome for the honeybee industry. Your submission, on page 32, suggests the creation of a system of tradeable licences for apiary sites on public land.

How do you envisage this system operating, and what will the benefit be to the beekeepers themselves?

Mr Riley—Currently the beekeepers are issued with annual permits for access to state forests, and the concept that we came to as a group was that, if we could work out a way of issuing tradeable licences that were longer term licences giving the beekeepers more security, it would be better for them to look at developing profitable commercial businesses with that extra security. In relation to the previous point, it might also give beekeepers more recognition as business entities, rather than having to apply for annual permits.

Mr Bourke—It would give security of resources. If we had a five- or 10-year lease we could plan more things and know that the coupes were going to be harvested. And tradeability would be good for business.

Mr Wolfhagen—Tradeability would give us some sort of intellectual property ownership. We have established these businesses and currently, really at the flick of a pen, we could lose the basis of our industry—the whole investment. We have been referred to as landless peasants, which in a sense is not entirely incorrect, in that we do not actually have any tenure. We have our hives, and they are infinitely moveable. Banks do not like them, because they are not really of any value and you cannot pin them down. So, by having a lease on a particular site, that gives us a value to the business and something to sell in our retirement. I guess it goes to the heart of the matter of why there is not more investment in the industry: what are you investing in? You are really only a worker. While you are still able to do it physically, you can produce a crop—but what about when you stop? It is like being a builder: when your hands stop being busy then you stop earning any money or you do not have any value in the business. So you do not have anything to bequeath or to sell to secure your retirement. In this day and age, it is particularly poignant.

CHAIR—There will be an enormous amount of interest stimulated in your industry right across Australia if those people who are the beneficiaries of the pollination process find out they are going to have to pay for it. That will be the difference between the industry trying to attract investment and put money back into its own business, and the business going downhill. But before that occurs, of course, I just ask the question generally of all of you about the comments made by CSIRO that the federal government has to consider putting in about $50 million per year to ensure that we positively address the possible incursion problems of insects and parasites that are offshore and to ensure that we have a training facility that starts to build up a core supply of those elements of the honeybee industry that we need to start building on, which was identified by our rural skills inquiry, to ensure that the industry continues to be viable and continues to significantly contribute to the level that it is currently contributing in agriculture. What are your thoughts about that?

Mr Bourke—I am very pleased to hear that it has gone out to a more realistic figure of $50 million, because previously it was $20 million. All studies had shown that we should put in at least $20 million to prevent the incursion of varroa for the devastation it would cause to our pollinating industries, especially if it wiped out all the feral hives. Then there would be great pressure on beekeepers to keep managing to pollinate our crops. Fees would double if we based it on the instance that happened in New Zealand recently. Fees would actually double for pollinating services.

Mr Wolfhagen—Reflect on that. It might be perverse for the beekeeping industry to say it, but varroa could be the making of us. It certainly was in New Zealand. When we went on the tour I referred to earlier, it was interesting. We went there thinking there was going to be all this woe, but they had grins on their faces from ear to ear, and we were wondering what was going on. It was because they are making money that they have never made before. The pollination fees have doubled because you do not have any background pollination. Varroa gets here and all your unmanaged hives, bad operators and feral stuff disappears. Only then will our agricultural community really understand the value of bee pollination, because there will be a hell of a pressure. There is already a looming shortfall here in Tasmania for hives for pollination, but it will not go anywhere near touching what will happen once varroa is here.

CHAIR—That is the very point that I was trying to make. It is a very salient point. As I understand it, New Zealand's honeybee population has dropped by about 20 or 25 per cent and it had the incursion of the varroa mite in the year 2000. Is that correct?

Mr Wolfhagen—Yes.

Mr Willmott—In the North Island.

CHAIR—Seven years down the track that is the impact it has had, and with our climate here and our wide-ranging feral honeybee population it will not be long before the varroa makes a very significant impact in this country.

Mr Ewington—I am also chairman of the apiary industry disease committee. We are now trying to facilitate the branches to bring beekeepers through training courses to become part of our industry. As we know, this industry in Tasmania has voluntary registration. We are doing fairly well in bringing most people in with voluntary registration, but the trouble is there are a lot of people out there who own beehives in backyards that are not part of our industry. We are trying to get the branches to bring those people forward to become part of our industry and hopefully facilitate them to take part in the future. Also, we are facilitating funds to instigate a course in industry readiness for disease incursion. This means that we will train beekeepers from all areas so they are available to be on the ground if an incursion happens. So we are starting to take control of our industry to go forward.

Mr Bourke—I will add to that. All hive registrations in Tasmania should be compulsory because if we get an incursion of varroa we should know where to go to look for it and to protect it. That should be compulsory. We have only got one apiary officer for the whole of the state to inspect hives, and that has been a real pressure. Right throughout Australia we do not have enough DPI people to inspect for disease. It is vital that we have more personnel to inspect our hives.

Mr Wolfhagen—I will change the subject slightly. Again from this apiary working group there is a very positive outcome that is encapsulated in the work that you have heard about from Graham Sargison—the funding that is going out of the Community Forest Agreement to ground truth and increase our knowledge of our resource. Also, they are assessing the productive capacity of apiary sites, which will lead to a better management distribution of the resources that we have. I believe that is a first. I have not seen or heard of it happening in other states, and I think it is a tremendous positive to come out of this working group.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I thank you for your attendance here today as representatives of the Forest Industry Council. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you. You will be sent a copy of the *Hansard* transcript of your evidence to which you can make editorial corrections. The *Hansard* reporter may wish to clarify some details with you before you leave. Thank you very much.

[11.40 am]

THOMPSON, Mr Robin, Manager, Extensive Agriculture Branch, and Chairman, Apiary Liaison Committee, Department of Primary Industries and Water

SARGISON, Mr Graham John, Manager, Field Services, Forestry Tasmania

CHAIR—Welcome. Before I go through the rest of the preliminaries, I would like to compliment you for being here. You have the distinct privilege of being the only government representatives across Australia that fronted this committee to give evidence. We thank you for that, because it is very important.

Mr ADAMS—Could we ask that that gets back to the minister.

Mr Thompson—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—Thank you, Robin.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament.

The committee has received a submission from the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries and Water. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

Mr Thompson—No.

CHAIR—Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission, or some introductory remarks?

Mr Thompson—Thank you, Mr Chairman. The Apiary Liaison Committee is an interface between crown land managers and the apiary industry. The crown land managers in Tasmania are the Department of Primary Industries and Water, Forestry Tasmania, Hydro Tasmania, and Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania. I think you have already heard how the leatherwood resource in particular is distributed between these sorts of agencies.

I will begin by putting the value of the Tasmanian apiary industry into some sort of context. I do not think there is any argument that the greatest value of the apiary industry is in the form of pollination, rather than in the actual sale of honey and honey products. We can debate what that finite amount is, but it is somewhere around $200 million in the case of Tasmania, which is about the same farm gate value as the red meat industry and the Tasmanian dairy industry. It is probably not seen in that light in the Tasmanian context or even the Australian context.

I think that it is important to focus today on some of the research and development issues that face the industry, rather than issues that we have raised in our submission, some of which have already been covered by Forestry and other presenters.

If the Tasmanian agricultural industries dependent upon pollination are going to grow, and there is a lot of evidence to show that indeed there is an expansion in those industries, especially the stone fruit industries and the pasture seed production industries, there is going to be an increasing demand for pollination.

If we accept the assertion that leatherwood is one of the keys to being able to provide that pollination service, and if we also accept that leatherwood is a fairly finite resource, then if we are going to meet that increasing demand for pollination, a few things have to happen. The first one is from a purely agronomic point of view. We might be able to manipulate some of our agricultural species so that they become more self-fertile and so that we reduce the demand for pollination. But that is somewhere out in blue sky land at the moment, and probably is not going to happen in the short term.

The other thing which we need to do to address that is to increase the yield or the stocking rate of available leatherwood so that we can get better production from the resource that we have. We can increase access to leatherwood, but that might not be so palatable in the sense of access to the resource in the parks. The final way that we might be able to increase that pollination source would be to replace leatherwood with some other species which can have a similar role. That might be a native species or it might be a species that we do not know anything about yet. Again, that might be a bit of blue sky.

Our understanding of the ecology and biology of leatherwood and its sustainable honey yield is not really well documented and not really well understood. There certainly has been some work done in that area, and Karen Ziegler and the work that she did were mentioned earlier. But I think that we need a proper audit and probably a review paper written on this issue in the Tasmanian context. Of course, that would require some funding and access to some expertise. A lot of that expertise, and the money too, is not really forthcoming in our state at the moment.

As I said earlier, if we are going to get the maximum from our leatherwood in order to maximise the pollination resource that we have available then we have to have some good science behind the stocking rate that we might have on bees in a particular leatherwood resource area. That might vary from year to year because obviously the production of nectar by the leatherwood is going to vary from year to year. It will be driven primarily by what the climate is doing. So we would need some sort of understanding of that basic biology so that we can get maximum yield and maximum bee density, bee populations.

We have seen in the course of this morning that there has been a fair bit of interdependency between the apiary industry, the agricultural industry and the forestry industry. We do not really have a good economic understanding of how the interdependency works. We do not know what would happen to the agricultural industry if bees decreased, stayed the same or increased in number. In respect of the relative values of the apiary and forestry industries, it is very easy on one level to say that a tree is worth X and the forestry is worth that. But often that is fairly superficial in that it does not take account of, if you like, the value-adding of the industry to agriculture. So perhaps there is some basic economic research which may be beneficial there.

Of course, bees are not the only insects that pollinate. We do not have a lot of alternatives in Tasmania. There are some native species, which are much less efficient pollinators than our introduced honey bee, and, of course, the bumble bee has been highlighted by some as a positive and highlighted by others as a negative. Perhaps in glasshouses and other situations there might be a place for them. Because the bumble bee is a much stronger flyer and can work in more adverse weather conditions than the honey bee, maybe there is a role for looking at that. But that sort of issue would raise all the usual biosecurity and other issues that would be flagged.

Another issue that was raised was the impact of our exotic bees on our endemic flora in our national parks. That has probably been one of the reasons why it has been a challenge to get the bees into national parks. There has been some work done on that which suggests that it is not a problem, but that work perhaps need some replication. We have heard lots of reference to the incursion of exotic bee diseases into Tasmania. Our industry is very lucky that we are relatively disease-free. But this is perhaps a question of when rather than if they arrive. One of the things that maybe we can do is to see if it is possible to breed for resistance to some of these exotic diseases. Obviously that is a long-term research project. The first step would be to have a look at these diseases around the world.

We have also heard about the uniqueness of Tasmanian honey as a product. I think most people would agree that leatherwood based honey is exceptional and unique. But, whilst we recognise that, from a pragmatic marketing point of view you can stick a 'leatherwood honey' label on anything really and make claims—just as we have seen with King Island beef and the King Island dairy industry. It ends up being a branding issue rather than a product issue.

Mr ADAMS—Especially for their rabbits.

Mr Thompson—Hares, yes, that is right—of which there are none on King Island. But it does say that King Island is a brand. The same issue perhaps faces the Tasmanian honey industry. One way around that might be through chemical characterisation and fingerprinting of that resource in perhaps a similar way to the way that we have a DNA register for the registration of new plant cultivars. But that would require some work and obviously an injection of funds. We also heard a bit about the influence of agricultural chemicals on bees and their toxicity. There is a need to take a twofold approach to this.

The first issue is the labelling of agricultural chemical containers. That is currently not as expansive or descriptive as it could be—usually because the active ingredient is not actually toxic to bees but the solvent and some of the other additives probably are. Surfactants are a classic example of that. They stop bees breathing. So there is a labelling issue and a need to look at the whole composition of the chemical rather than just the active component. There is an extension program, which it is obviously important to keep going. Our minister gave a commitment to doing that when he met with members of the TBA a few weeks ago. There will be an education program which will be ongoing.

We hear a lot of claims about cause and effect with agricultural chemicals and some of the subclinical effects that we can see—for example, if a pre-emergent herbicide or insecticide is applied then it gets translocated through the plant and can have a sub toxic effect on bees. A lot of that is conjecture. There is no good scientific evidence to say what is happening one way or the other. Often in these issues it is very easy to blame these things; they become whipping boys.

We have to be a bit careful that we do not do that and that we keep the whole thing in perspective. So there is a need for better science to underpin the use of agricultural chemicals.

The issue of the hobbyist was raised a moment ago with the need for the registration of all bees. We have come from that scenario a few years ago. Governments have since moved away from being regulators towards self-regulation. The case of foot-and-mouth disease showed that it was good to know where all the pig producers in the state were. The analogy with the beekeeping industry is that it is potentially the small honey producers who are a major threat to the industry as a whole if there is an incursion of disease that is not recognised and if those people cannot come on board. Again, when the minister met with the TBA a few weeks ago he signed on to the department being more active in bringing the hobby industry into the commercial world on the pretext of biosecurity. I think that might be the trigger which gets their community conscience active.

The other biosecurity issue which is another avenue that our department is strong on is that Tasmania has been very active in the bait hive program. I think that has been a really good example of how industry has cooperated with government. The government did put some resources into the bait hive program and the sentinel hive program, but a lot of the on ground work has been done by industry itself. That shows that a model of cooperation and a whole-of-industry approach can be quite effective. The work here in Tasmania, together with some of the work in Queensland, is probably leading the charge in that respect.

Earlier someone mentioned the organic production of honey, probably from our native forests. There is potential conflict arising from that as to where the organic and non-organic people might interface. This conflict would not be unique to the apiary industry. I think it will happen in production agriculture elsewhere. You have to be able to draw a line somewhere, and it is very hard to put a boundary around organic versus non-organic. If my bee is non-organic and it flies into your zone, which is organic, the warning bells will start to ring—not just about the status of organic or non-organic but also about litigation and the serious consequences that that would bring. That is an issue for the whole of agriculture rather than just the apiary industry.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for a very comprehensive overview. I will put a couple of things to you. You talked about pollination alternatives. Do they produce honey like honey bees do?

Mr Thompson—No, not really. But if we were able to find some viable alternatives then they would fulfil the pollination role, which would be their core business rather than the production of honey. One cannot be all things to all people, but if their primary role was pollination then they would fulfil that role.

CHAIR—Your submission highlights—and I am going into research and training at the moment—a number of significant research options. What research is the Tasmanian government itself undertaking into issues affecting the honeybee industry?

Mr Thompson—There is none.

CHAIR—Does the Tasmanian government provide extension and training services to the honeybee industry?

Mr Thompson—It is minimal. To go back to your first question, the Tasmanian government, in agriculture, is moving away from providing research, development and extension services. It is moving out to an organisation known as the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, which is an agreement between the Tasmanian government and the University of Tasmania. That will be increasingly fulfilling the research, development and extension roles in agriculture. At the moment, the only production agriculture industries that remain within the department of primary industry are the horticultural industry and the extensive agriculture industry, being red meat, wool, pastures and cereals.

CHAIR—Are you saying that the Tasmanian government—and correct me if I am wrong in making this presumption—is going down the road that the New South Wales government went down about 15 years ago, when it stopped supplying a free service and allowed an industry to supply a paid service so that fees for service replaced what was otherwise a free service to people in agriculture?

Mr Thompson—The user-pays philosophy has been in Tasmania since the early eighties, but the outputs from the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research would be free, if you like, because their funding is derived not only from the state and the Commonwealth through the university system but also from industry R&D levies. The type of research that that institution would do would really be driven by the funding that was available and the bargaining power of the various industries.

CHAIR—I have a couple more questions and then I will let my colleagues ask some. They are anxious to know about what is going on in Tasmania. Would the Tasmanian government be prepared to support or contribute to a national centre for honeybee related research, extension and training?

Mr Thompson—I would be very brave if I said yes and very brave if I said no, so I will say that we would need to see the business case.

CHAIR—Finally, what are the principal biosecurity threats to the Tasmanian honeybee industry? What does the Tasmanian government believe should be done to address those threats?

Mr Thompson—Varroa and the others have been well highlighted by our industry colleagues. I think that we do have a very good relationship with industry, as I said before, with the bait and sentinel hive program. There is also a good relationship with Quarantine, because Quarantine is part of DPIW. That was highlighted fairly recently when a container came in with a hive and that was dealt with. It is a good working relationship which will hopefully continue.

CHAIR—On that point, we have heard evidence that a lot of people are concerned that we do not have enough sentinel stations, based on the experience in New Zealand.

Mr Thompson—With Tasmania being an island, I guess the highest risk of incursion would be through our ports. I think that Port Latta is the last port to have one established. We could then say that we have all of our significant ports covered.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Are there any at the airports?

Mr Thompson—No. I suppose that bees would have trouble surviving on the outside of an aircraft. There is unlikely to be a swarm in the hold of an aircraft. You might bring in the odd bee, but—

CHAIR—I am concerned about the way in which we moved away from spraying inside aircraft, with the way aircraft move around the world today. I raise this with the minister from time to time. I think we should get back to that process.

Mr ADAMS—Robin, thank you very much for your good overview. Do you think that, within our culture in Tasmania, we realise the icon that leatherwood honey is for the state?

Mr Thompson—Probably not, locally. I guess it has always been there and you never really give value to the thing at your doorstep, do you? There needs to be a bit of education. I am not sure what the Tasmanian market for leatherwood is versus the—

Mr ADAMS—Could we improve that? Do you think we could have better knowledge and that we could take it a bit more seriously than we do? In each state and each part of the world, brands are what it is all about—where we are. This is a unique icon for Tasmania. Is it something that we need to take more seriously than we have in the past?

Mr Thompson—Certainly. We are producing about six per cent of Australian honey. The same sort of rule is probably true for most of our agricultural production. There is probably an argument that the whole of agriculture in Tasmania is niche, and maybe it is something that should be done collectively for agriculture rather than for just one particular industry. It is happening to a degree in the red meat industry: there is the branded Tasmanian grain-fed beef and the Tasmanian grass-fed beef. They are the King Island brands; they are out there as brands. A lot of our dairy products go onto the world market as branded products rather than commodities. Certainly a lot more work could be done through Brand Tasmania, but the nucleus of branded, state agricultural produce is there.

Mr ADAMS—I go to the registration of hives. Do we have a register for every hive in Tasmania?

Mr Thompson—No, not really.

Mr ADAMS—Do you think that we need to come back to that, with the threats that are facing us now?

Mr Thompson—It is all about risk management, I guess. Certainly, knowing where every hive was would be a very significant advantage. There is no point having a registration system unless you can police it, and that requires the input of resources. It is the same when we talk about FMD and whatever risks we might perceive. I think that increasing public awareness is perhaps the first step. If hobbyists can be signed up, if you like, in the context that they are contributing to biosecurity issues, it is the carrot and big stick sort of approach, in that we might bring them along with the carrot rather than the big stick.

CHAIR—They have a vested interest, haven't they—

Mr Thompson—Absolutely.

CHAIR—to keep their own little hobby pocket bee industry.

Mr ADAMS—And I take your point in relation to pigs. This committee has good experience that there are a lot of pigs in Australia that are not registered and that could play an enormous, bad role in the introduction of other diseases. When we think about bees, wild bees and things, they are a continuation. So, other than the recognition that we register our hives or we try to bring people on to have an understanding that there is a danger to the bee industry, what else can we do as a state through the state government structures?

Mr Thompson—You can use lots of instruments, I suppose, for getting practice change. There is a whole range from passive to legislation. As we said, legislation is perhaps the least preferred because it does require a lot of resources to enforce. If we can get some passive compliance then that is much better, but the whole gambit requires an injection of resources. I suppose, if you are taking a totally pragmatic view, resources for agriculture and the apiary industry are competing on a state basis with resources for health and education, and we know how high profile they are at the moment.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I would like to ask, in relation to the concerns that were raised by industry representatives earlier this morning about the present impossibility of live bee exports: what assistance or consideration has the department given to that matter?

Mr Thompson—To my knowledge, it has not been raised. It might have been raised with somebody else, but it has not come through the Apiary Liaison Committee and I have no knowledge really.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Were you here to listen to those comments?

Mr Thompson—Yes, I heard them.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Do you think it would be possible for you to take that on notice and perhaps come back to the committee with some initial thoughts on that? I ask you to give consideration to what role the department could play, if there is a chance of a mutually satisfactory outcome with other state jurisdictions. Could that be looked at by your department?

Mr Thompson—We could do that.

CHAIR—Can I just go to the issue of resource security. What specific policy initiatives has the Tasmanian government undertaken to maintain beekeeper access to floral resources?

Mr Thompson—Graham might be a better man to answer this.

Mr Sargison—I think that is an absolutely crucial issue. On state forest, as I said earlier, we manage for multiple use so that beekeepers will always be welcome on state forest. But, as we said earlier, although we may differ somewhat on the percentages of leatherwood-rich forest, the majority is in reserves. Leatherwood is so critical to this industry, for both honey and pollination,

that if we do want to move ahead I think we do have to make access available into those reserves for the beekeepers.

CHAIR—What about the reserves that are locked up in our national parks and wilderness areas, which are not just the Tasmanian government's but government and territory excuses for keeping everybody out? The point I am making is that Mr Thompson referred to some scientific evidence centred on criticisms, but there is no scientific evidence available to any government that justifies the reason for locking beekeepers out of national parks and wilderness areas.

Mr Thompson—I guess it is one of philosophy, isn't it? There is a perception that wilderness is wilderness and—

CHAIR—I think it is more politics. The IEU has been heavily involved in some wilderness fights for about nine or 10 years in the Kosciuszko National Park. I think it is a political philosophical action rather than anything centred around science and protection of our biodiversity. The final outcome of those decisions is that we destroy more than we lock up to protect because we allow the introduced species to proliferate to the extent that it creates massive problems for our biodiversity. Do you have any opinion on why we would lock beekeepers out of national parks and wilderness areas in an environment where the argument has been from the environmental groups to governments of the day that they interfere with our natural bees or something to that effect? Do you have any views on those sorts of issues?

Mr Sargison—I certainly cannot understand the reasoning. We have got wasps in there and bumblebees and, as Julian said earlier, we have got honey bees that overfly the boundary—they do not know where the boundary is—so it seems farcical to exclude them. In fact, our parks have withdrawn access. In some cases we have had existing roads into what are now reserve areas and they have actually pulled up those roads and withdrawn access in a couple of cases. We have supported the beekeepers in trying to reopen that access—without success. I think one of the management guidelines in the World Heritage area was to close any unnecessary road access. But when the road is already there it does seem rather strange to me.

CHAIR—There is always an interpretation of what constitutes wilderness too. I have fought that issue for many, many years but the reality is that wilderness is sections of land that have not been impacted upon in any way, shape or form by man. Once you have those sorts of activities wilderness no longer meets the interpretation of wilderness. But that is another issue.

I was interested in the comments made about the sentinel hive program, and I think that is a very good program. I do not know whether you were here when we talked about some bees being found on one of the wharves in North Queensland by an electrician. It happened to be a long weekend and there were no Customs people on duty—they were all off on the long weekend. Fortunately, the volunteer movement through the beekeeping industry had a contact number and the electrician was able to ring and a beekeeper went out and checked the hive. Fortunately, it was not something that was going to create a problem for us. But flowing on from that, the suggestion was that we needed to multiply our sentinel hive program 600-fold because there were just not enough sentinel sites to protect us.

Mr Thompson—I suppose there is a difference between sentinel and bait. Sentinel really means that if there is an incursion into the population and that gets into the hive that you are

monitoring, by the time you find it in the sentinel hive the horse has probably bolted. Whereas if you have got your bait hive, hopefully, that initial incursion will be into that bait hive—

CHAIR—I might have the two confused.

Mr Thompson—I do not know whether it is allowable, but Des would have wanted to say something on that, I think.

CHAIR—Well, he cannot away from the table, unfortunately. He can talk to us after we have taken evidence.

Mr Sargison—I would also stress the point that Des was making about registration. Although it is not compulsory in Tasmania, we do still have a registration list which is maintained by the department. We insist that any of the beekeepers on state forests are registered. I think it is important to know who you have and where they are. I would just like to stress the importance that Forestry puts on registration.

Mr Thompson—We have a reasonably comprehensive map of the apiary sites that are available on crown land.

CHAIR—My final question is related to the activities that might be in force as far as the Tasmanian government agencies are concerned in the control of pests and diseases such as American foulbrood, European foulbrood and the Braula fly. Do you have any information you can give to the committee in relation to what the government is doing about those particular diseases?

Mr Thompson—I guess it is the philosophy of the industry to look after itself. The agency does not have the capability to go around and inspect every hive every year, and it does not do that. It perhaps falls down with the hobbyists. The assumption is that our commercial beekeepers know what those diseases are and what to do about them—or at least if they see something odd they know where to get the support—but perhaps the hobbyist does not know that. That is not unique to the apiary industry. It is pretty much across the whole of agriculture. Hobby farmers pose a similar sort of threat because the horse can have bolted, so to speak, before they actually recognise the problem. I think it is a problem that is across all hobbyists—that they perhaps are not supported. It comes back to an issue of not knowing what you do not know.

CHAIR—Are you saying that the Tasmanian government does not put out any educational pamphlets?

Mr Thompson—There is general education, but of course we know that the hit rate of that is not 100 per cent and never will be. It is dependent upon the hobbyists accessing those channels of education. It is hardly prime-time news, so the information is probably only in publications that not all hobbyists would access. The publication that we would use is *Tas Regions*, which is produced by our department. We know its circulation is to about 15,000 or 16,000 people. There are only 3,000 to 4,000 commercial farmers in the state, so two-thirds of them go to somebody else. Whether or not they are hobbyists is pretty hard to know.

CHAIR—They are going to be prime-time news if the yields start dropping in some of the crops in the country.

Mr Thompson—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence. It is very much appreciated. The committee deeply appreciates the interest shown by everybody who has come today. It is very important that we hear from the industry about their concerns and about the information that they have gained through years and years of working in the industry. If we are going to put out a very strong report, we need to know, to some extent, what we are talking about. Politicians do take an interest in what they are doing from time to time, believe it or not, and we have found this inquiry very educational. We hoped to put the report together before the next election, but in my view that is not likely now and it will probably occur after the election. I think the *Hansard* will enable us to absorb a depth of knowledge. I thank Hansard for the contribution they have made today and continue to make, ably backed up by our secretariat. We thank each and every one of the witnesses who appeared here today. I thank representatives of the Tasmanian government for their attendance here today—the only attendance by any government representatives to any of our hearings. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Michael Ferguson**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.20 pm