

Dear Sirs,

I hope I can make a useful contribution to the outcome of the Inquiry.

As background information, may I explain that this is the 50th year I have been involved in Beekeeping. In all these years, I have purposefully avoided learning many of the preconceived ideas about methods of bee management, though of course, so much makes commonsense. While I had a different career, in Education, for many years I was able to observe the organisational problems of the industry, and its strengths and weaknesses.

The current challenge is a product of those aspects.

Since about 1990, most of my focus has been on the study of bees, and the potential for our industry. In fact, I have a unique role in the control of feral bees across the Sydney region which has given me a chance to understand the natural habits of bees, and how they think and act. With such a range of feral colonies, it is possible to learn more about bee behaviour if you maintain an open mind, than perhaps many people who mainly deal with controlled or managed apiaries. For example, I have learnt much about community groupings, and genetic similarities between bees in particular areas, and a lot about behavioural patterns of bees that few people would be aware of.

For this reason, I am the Specialist to whom people are usually referred for assistance with bee problems, particularly since the Department of Ag has not been able to respond to what is otherwise regarded as a pest control problem. I am the provider of beekeeping services to City of Sydney, Parramatta City Council, Canterbury, Kuring gai, and numerous other councils, WIRES, SES, Police and so on. There is only one other person in the Sydney region who can be safely recommended to provide a competent service of this kind, and that is Eric Whitby of Engadine, a president of the Commercial Apiarists Association.

It is also relevant that since 1997, I have built up a business known as Australian Honey Exports Pty Ltd, with a view to giving producers a stronger financial alternative to the local market. AHE sought to create the opportunity to get better prices in Europe, Japan, and Asia in general.

This point is CRUCIALLY important, we MUST maintain the viability of our local industry, while the rest of the world experiences the decline and demise of bees, that we are witnessing at present. In support of this, I set up a factory, invested about \$1.4Million, and maintained marketing efforts in target markets, where eventually, I hoped we would find ways and means of sustaining bees against varroa parasites. I had hoped to run trials of some innovative solutions to this problem, in countries that are badly affected, before the problem arrived here. Around 2002, I made representations to obtain financial support for the research of Dr Denis Anderson, but no one would listen. There was even criticism that it was premature concern.

I hold a patent application for a system of baiting varroa parasites, that has subsequently been developed in Florida.

What may be relevant to the inquiry is the fact that I am prepared to apply what I have learnt about tracking and eliminating feral bees in Sydney, to the eradication of Asian Bees in the Cairns area. I would simply need sufficient financial support to make that possible, or to be given a part to play in the team that is involved.

Why this is relevant, is that one threat to the honey industry is the potential arrival of varroa parasites which comes from the risk that they might arrive concealed in small craft that have travelled from New Zealand.

The chances of their dispersal via feral colonies close to the harbour, means that a systematic and thorough approach to controlling feral colonies, has been most successful. There has been a noticeable reduction of feral colonies around Sydney in the past few years.

This systematic approach, is also particularly well proven by my success in eliminating European Wasps, which were frequently mistaken for bees, until a few years ago. The Insect Enquiries Officer from Dept of Enterprise and Investment, (previously Dept of Ag) at Orange, Ms Merydyn Davison credits me with the fact that this problem was contained very quickly. For this work, I became licensed as a Pest Controller, so I have a knowledge of the most suitable chemicals and methods, as well as a knowledge of bees.

The Asian Bee crisis is so serious, as is the threat of varroa parasites, that I do not see a long term future for the honey industry. In fact, I now almost regret that I put so much investment at risk in setting up Australian Honey Exports Pty Ltd.

At the time that the company was operating in Seven Hills, I employed an average of six or seven people, and offered support to about 20 to 30 producers. As the main suppliers of Honey to the European market became less able to supply uncontaminated honey, I could see that the Australian industry had enormous potential. At the moment, my business is suspended. I am reluctant to take more risk until I know that these threats are being properly addressed.

Unless threats like apis Cerana, and varroa Destructor are controlled and eliminated, obviously, we will loose basically everything we have, and the capacity to pollinate other crops as well.

The industry needs time to build up viable market alternatives in which they might put their trust. Here is a potential for Australian Export Trade that has been undervalued and at a disadvantage for a long time. Nothing at all will be possible unless this Asian Bee threat is addressed completely and without delay.

We will simply not be able to recover our present potential if we wait until it is too late.

I often think the situation is simply so serious that there is little point in worrying about having superannuation or a retirement plan. It is certainly credible, that a period of five or six years is the crucial time for us to turn our honey industry into new hope for the regeneration of bees in countries where the pollination of crops is now difficult.

Rod Yates.

Australian Honey Exports Pty Ltd