

Submission to the Inquiry by the Rural Affairs and Transport Reference Committee

Science Underpinning the Inability to Eradicate the Asian Honeybee

By Trevor Weatherhead

My name is Trevor Francis Weatherhead and I am putting in a further written submission following evidence given to the Inquiry today, 31 March, 2011.

I have been involved with the current Asian bee response since I came onto the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) in May, 2009. This became the Consultative Committee on Asian Honey Bee (CCAHB) as it was drawn to the attention of CCEAD that it could not deal with the response. There was no deed in place since the position was that we were now dealing with the Asian bee and not the Varroa mite, as no mites had been detected on the Asian bees. This would now need to be dealt with outside the two deeds i.e. EADRA and EPPRD.

I had been part of the consultation process in Queensland since 29 July, 2008 when IP8 was found. There had been a period from 8 November 2007 to 29 July, 2008 when no Asian bees were detected. I have provided advice to industry and other interested people on a regular basis since 30 July, 2008. My last advice was numbered 91 on 18 March, 2011. I can supply copies of these advices to the Committee if they feel it will help them in their deliberations.

I make these further comments in light of the fact that the Committee members are to be supplied with all minutes and thus, my discussing them now, does not breach any confidentiality as they are in the hands of Committee members.

When the copies of minutes are supplied, please note that they say in the minutes of 21 May, 2009 point 2 that the amended Response Plan from Queensland was to be put to the Primary Industries CEO's. This was because there was no National Management Group (NMG) in the same way that there was no CCEAD. So this group was a de facto NMG.

Also in the same minutes, in point 8, note the plea from Queensland for funding support as urgent priority for the continuation of the response.

Also note that there is 11 months before final agreement by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) in April, 2010.

It was said at the hearing today, that there was no modelling available to show the spread of the Asian bee in Australia. I would draw the Inquiry's attention to the draft briefing paper supplied by the National Biosecurity Committee as set out in "out of session paper" under cover of an email from CCEAD on 26 June, 2009, in particular, issue number 5. It clearly states that the Climex modelling "indicates that the climatic conditions suitable for AHB exist in coastal areas in all Australian states and territories".

It was stated at today's hearing that eradication of the Asian bee was attempted in Papua New Guinea. I believe that on 24 March, Dr. Denis Anderson said eradication was not attempted. So the notion that no one has eradicated Asian bees is correct but it must have the rider that, before this current program, no one has tried.

The response by Queensland was attempted initially with not a lot people on the ground. For the program, to give a snap shot, I list the numbers at certain dates. These include office and field staff.

1.8.08	4
2.8.08	9
24.9.08	11 + 4 industry
28.11.08	12
26.6.09	13
19.3.10	20
9.4.10	32
18.6.10	39
15.11.10	casual staff dismissed
2.12.10	11

I would put to the Committee that with the low numbers, only a limited response could be mounted. Once there was a larger field commitment, then more numbers of Asian bees were being found. The conclusion could be drawn that, had more field numbers been made available sooner, those outlying finds e.g. Innisfail and Lake Eacham may not have occurred. However, once the numbers were increased, the finds increased and we were starting to get on top of the situation.

In my evidence on 24 March, I said the figures for the eradication of \$5million a year were drawn from the figures supplied by Queensland for a six (6) month extension of the full program from November, 2010. I heard it said that Queensland said it would take \$5million a year i.e. \$10 over two (2) years. Technically Queensland did not say this. It was me extrapolating the figures Queensland supplied for six (6) months.

I would challenge the evidence given by DAFF staff that industry could not provide expertise on the Scientific Committee. Whilst industry may not have been there in the past, I believe we should be now. To quote my own example, I was an Apiary Officer with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries from 1983 till 1988. If I stayed in that position, I would now be regarded as an expert.

However since I chose to leave and run my own beekeeping business, it suddenly means, if you take the DAFF position, that I do not have any scientific expertise in bees, but I am just a hands on beekeeper. I would say that my expertise has increased since I left the Department as I have been able to attend world conferences on my own behalf, present papers at those conferences and also make contact, which I have maintained, with many eminent bee scientists worldwide. If I had stayed in the Department, I would not have had the opportunity to build up this world wide

contact base as I would not have had the opportunity to go to the conferences as I was not the senior officer and preference would be given to the senior officer.

No offence to those previously on the Scientific Committee but I have far more experience with Asian bees than some on that Committee, but because I am a beekeeper and not a Departmental Officer, then it is suggested I could not contribute to that Committee. However I would submit that I have expertise that needs to be utilised.

It was said today that funding was available from November 2010 till today, 31 March. So far I believe that Queensland has received no funding since November 2010. Also I raised the point in my previous written submission as to what that funding was to cover. The decision by NMG was made before the casual staff were dismissed in November 2010. So if funding was available why were the staff dismissed? I know it has been said that it was because of the wet season but I would submit that there was plenty of fine weather that would have allowed surveillance before the onset of the wet season. I was told it was because the money had run out.

Also DAFF spoke today of the program currently under consideration. It should be made clear that this is not an eradication program. It is a "transitional containment program". This means it is a way of going from the full eradication to where Government walks away with no further commitment. As I said in the 7.30 report interview, I have difficulty in seeing how they will contain the Asian bee. There will be far less numbers of staff than was used in the full eradication program. If it is said that the eradication program was not working with the staff numbers they had, how can containment occur with less staff numbers? As I see it, it is a way of stepping back but at the same time saying that something is being done when, in reality, no meaningful response is being mounted.

I would thank the Committee for the undertaking that was given by DAFF to again convene the CCEPP. However, as was stated in evidence today, it needs to be a consensus decision. So if one or two States or the Commonwealth still maintain a position of the Asian bee not being technically feasible to eradicate, then the full program does not come back into place. I would consider this a flaw in the CCEPP process where the will of the majority could be thwarted by a minority.

We owe it to our children, our grandchildren and their grandchildren to immediately re-instate a full eradication program of the Asian bee.

I would be pleased to contribute any further information to the Committee that they would ask for.

Trevor Weatherhead
31 March, 2011