



Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc
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Submission to Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

Agriculture (Biosecurity Protection) Levies Bill 2024 and related bills

Executive Summary

- AHBIC strongly opposes the Biosecurity Protection Levy (BPL)
- The Honey Bee industry already contributes significant money towards immediate-post border, post border and on farm biosecurity measures that is not recognised by government
- This submission highlights the inequity of the proposed implementation including collection mechanisms, whole of industry contributions and the calculations of the levy
- Those that create the biosecurity risk should help fund pre border and border biosecurity.

Introduction

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) is an independent, not for profit, national peak industry body. AHBIC has been protecting and promoting the Honey Bee and Pollination industry for more than 23 years. AHBIC represents beekeepers and members of the Australian beekeeping industry to all levels of government, private enterprise and the public. AHBIC's member bodies include membership-based beekeeping groups from:

- All states of Australia
- Specialist Pollination groups
- Specialist Queen Bee Breeders
- Those who buy, package and market our honey
- Representatives of the expanding recreational beekeeping sector

The Australian Honey Bee industry is a strong and vibrant industry that generated \$640 million in farm gate value in 2023 and contributes billions to the greater agricultural sector through pollination services. A key driver of the industries prosperity is a strong biosecurity system.





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Australia remains largely free of many of the pests and diseases that plague the global honey bee population and reduce beekeeping businesses viability.

Whilst we have recently seen Varroa destructor arrive in Australia there are still 12 high priority honey bee pests that our industry needs to be protected from. The honey bee industry takes biosecurity so seriously that we are one of the few industries to fund, through a statutory levy, an immediate post-border surveillance program. This surveillance program known as the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program (NBPSP), is funded through a partnership between the honey bee industry and several pollination dependent industries including the grains industry. Notably, Commonwealth contributions are only made as matching funds for some of the pollination dependent industries and NOT by directly contributing to the program.

The notion that growers, or in this case beekeepers, should contribute to the national biosecurity system without recognising the existing high level of investment beekeepers already contribute, erodes the shared responsibility narrative.

The highest risk points for biosecurity threats occur at entry pathways into Australia. These are mainly shipping ports or air passenger and air cargo entry points. Importers, exporters (arrival of bulk carriers to load minerals) and incoming passengers create the risk. Our industry would encourage government to explore ways for biosecurity levies to be implemented for those that create the risk.

The National Bee Pest Surveillance Program

The NBPSP has strategic surveillance sites across the country at high-risk ports. This program has been established as a second line of defence to the federal government pre-border surveillance program and picks up many detections that the federal system fails to detect. Over the last decade there has been many significant detections of exotic honey bee pests that have required a biosecurity response. This includes the 3 active responses (Newcastle, Brisbane and Karratha) currently in play.

The majority of these biosecurity responses requires a cost shared approach to achieve eradication. The honey bee industry component of the cost sharing is ultimately paid for by the beekeepers through statutory levies. Most notably the recent Newcastle varroa destructor response will cost our beekeepers in excess of \$1.1 million dollars. It is likely that our statutory levies will have to increase in the order of 40% over the next decade to repay the industry debt





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created by the response. This does not take into account the negative impacts the response has had on potential honey production and industry viability.

Our beekeepers not only pay for a surveillance program to cover the inadequacies of the federal system, but also contribute to the costs of any eradication program. This is in addition to the significant burden of on-farm biosecurity measures.

Equitable calculation of the BPL

The Biosecurity Protection Levy is proposed to be calculated on the 2021 statutory levies. The honey bee industry collects 4.6 cents/kg of honey sold which is distributed to many industry activities. 2.7 cents/kg of that is allocated to biosecurity. It is unreasonable to determine industries contributions based on the proactive establishment of statutory levies to fund industry activities including biosecurity. This penalises the industries that have been proactive in establishing levy funded programs which includes establishing the proactive NBSP.

Equitable collection of the BPL

Whilst the department has not provided any information as to how they propose to collect the levy from the honey bee industry we can assume that the current collection pathway will be used.

Currently beekeepers are only required to pay the levy if they sell more than 1,500kg of honey. This production flaw was established due to the high cost of collection exceeding the levy money collected for honey amounts below 1,500kg. As a result, the majority of the 47,000 recreational beekeepers in the country are not required to contribute to the levy system and thus contribute to national biosecurity. Based on registered hive numbers in the country it is estimated that approximately half of the national honey crop is now not levied as it produced by many smaller recreational beekeepers. This portion of industry are either not required to contribute honey levies or sell direct to consumers without declaring their honey sales and hence honey levies.

Relying on the current collection system will result in the 2,000 commercial beekeepers being burdened with the additional levies and the rest of the 47,000 recreational beekeepers continuing to benefit from the contributions of a few. This proposal of piggybacking on the existing levy system for our industry, will only exacerbate the inequities of the system.





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Inequitable implementation

If industry wants to increase, modify or establish a statutory levy we must complete the 12-step process to ensure industry is thoroughly consulted on the proposal. In the case of the BPL, government has forced this proposal with no consultation with no direction on what they require us to do as an industry to impose these changes. This inequality drives resentment not only within industry but more so from peak industry bodies who have, over the years, invested significant time and money in implementing the 12-step levy process.

Conclusion

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council strongly opposes the BPL in its current form. We require the government to recognise the significant contribution our industry already makes to biosecurity. If the government persists in imposing this tax, then significant consultation is requested so that a more equitable process for calculation and collection of honey levies from whole of industry is developed.

We strongly urge the Government to impose a biosecurity levy on those that create the biosecurity risk.

