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THE FUTURE OF THE BEEKEEPING AND POLLINATION SERVICE INDUSTRIES IN AUSTRALIA

My name is Harold Saxvik and I am a commercial apiarist/pollinator in the Riverina of New South Wales. I am a member of the NSW Apiarists' Association. I served as president of the NSW and Victoria Crop Pollination Association for three years and was on the state executive of the NSW Apiarists Association for two years.

Our business, The Saxvik's Honey and Pollination Service, is a family business based in Darlington Point, NSW. The art of beekeeping in our family began over sixty years ago and is now into the third generation of apiarists. Our business maintains between 2,000 – 3,000 hives.

We have provided a pollination service to our area for over fifty years. We pollinate cereal, seed and fruit crops.

The issues, concerns and challenges that are impinging on our beekeeping industry are:

- Cotton and its effects on the Beekeeping Industry
- Crop spraying
- Access to sites on forest, national parks and stock routes
- Pest control
- Imported pests
- Conflict between state government departments.

Cotton:

Over recent years cotton cropping has expanded greatly in our area. With this expansion has come the increased usage of strong chemicals that are and will have long term effects on our local environment – land, air and insects.

The range of chemicals used by agronomist/farmers to control pests in their crops is inconsistent. Their lack of concern for other local industries in their area is proving to be a major life threatening concern in rural communities/townships.

Our business experience with this is first hand. In February 2013, two local farmers sprayed their cotton crops with a very lethal chemical over a 48 hour period. We were never contacted by them and in the first incident our hives and ourselves were on a neighbouring farm doing a trial on pollinating cotton. Our hives and selves were clearly visible to neighbouring farmers. The crop plane flew over us spraying the crop with a lethal insecticide.

We discovered dead and dying bees around our hives less then 24 hours later. I contacted the crop spraying company and told them we had bees in the area and breeder queens at our Honey Shed, which is in the town of Darlington Point.

Again less then 24 hours later this same crop sprayer sprayed another farm in the area with the same insecticide. The end result was we lost over 500 hives, contracts for future crop pollination and honey production.

Crop Spraying:

Apiarists are repeatedly being sprayed with pesticides used by neighbouring farms. We can be contracted to pollinate crops by seed companies/farmers and the lack of communication between farmers and the lack of knowledge/understanding that bees can and do forage onto other crops is a huge issue in our industry.

Our bee related associations do a lot to support apiarists and expand the knowledge of our industry to the general community. But what about the farming associations, would it not be in their best interest to also educate everyone in their industries about the importance of bees.

Access to Sites:

Consistent legislation needs to be in place for the use of National Parks, Travelling Stock Routes and State Forest by apiarists. This would enable us to have access to the pollens found in these areas which are needed to further strengthen our beehives for the increasing demands for bees with crop pollination.

Pest Control:

Like all farming industries, apiarists also have pest that have to be regularly looked for and if/when found dealt with, e.g.

- American Foulbrood
- European Foulbrood
- Small Hive Beetle
- Nosema

If diseases are found in the early stages they can and are removed from hives/yards of bees. If not detected they become a very serious problem to our industry in general.

Unfortunately not all beekeepers, commercial/hobby farmers are registered and in most cases do not check their hives regularly. Mandatory registration is a *must* in our industry to help eliminate/control pests and diseases that affect our hives.

Regular checks on mandatory registration of hives/apiarists is becoming increasingly difficult due to the decrease in Department of Primary Industries beekeeping staff in many states due to state budget cuts.

Imported Pests:

It is extremely important that state and federal governments continue to protect and monitor Australian borders. We need to keep up our vigilance on our border security. Continued inspection of all incoming vessels, sea and air, be regularly and consistently checked for insects, e.g. varroa mite.

The spread of these pests would affect our industry – crop pollination/honey gathering greatly. Any incursion of imported pests into Australia would have a critical impact on the price of crop pollination and honey gathering to the farming sector.

Conflict between State Government Departments:

State government departments should and must interpret acts passed through state legislatures the same way.

Apiarists whose hives have been or are being sprayed are finding it increasingly difficult to secure compensation for hives lost because of negligence and ignorance on the part of the agronomist/farmers.

It was through our experience with the Cotton spraying in 2013 we discovered that the Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Primary Industries interpreted the NSW Pesticides Act in different ways. The EPA stated that the label on the chemicals used was only a guide for the agronomists/farmers/ crop spraying companies. The DPI stated that the label on the chemicals used was a legal document. The EPA did not support our case and no fines or infringement notices were given to the persons responsible for the spraying of the lethal chemical that killed our hives.

I strongly suggest that any acts relating to farming that are developed and passed by state/federal governments are interpreted by all government departments the same way.

As an apiarist and Australian, I cannot stress the importance of protecting our natural environment. Measures, laws and or acts must be put in place to protect and secure it. This will also secure the future of the beekeeping and pollination service industries in this country.

BEE SECURITY IS FOOD SECURITY

Harold J Saxvik
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