

To The Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport

A Submission on behalf of the Beekeepers Association of the ACT Inc.

The Beekeepers Association of the ACT is an association of mainly hobby beekeepers from Canberra and the surrounding areas of the ACT and NSW. A few of our members sell a small amount of honey at local markets and to friends and family but most keep one or two hives for their own pleasure and for honey for their family and for pollinating their gardens.

Hobby beekeepers contribute to their local community through providing a free pollination service for vegetables and fruit grown in their neighbourhood as well as providing their own families with food in the form of honey and home grown vegetables and fruit. Our members main investment in their hobby is in time but the cost of setting up oneself for hobby beekeeping is of the order of \$1500 to \$2000 and ongoing costs are about \$50-\$100 per year for a couple of hives.

In the Canberra Area there are two small businesses providing beekeeping supplies to hobby beekeepers including our members. These businesses are totally dependant on beekeeping for their existence. The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) presently conducts three beekeeping courses each year with an enrolment of approximately 45 students each year. These courses are mainly designed for hobby beekeepers but it is possible that some of the students will go on to engage in beekeeping as a commercial activity. Hobby beekeeping is likely to become a much less attractive option if Asian bees and/or Varroa invade our area and these courses would cease with a consequent financial loss to CIT. Many bee experts consider this to be a very real possibility.

The social loss to our 150 members of their hobby and a friendly society which is based on a shared enthusiasm and help is a concern to us. Many of our members contribute to the local community by taking beekeeping displays to local agricultural shows and other festivals. They also regularly give talks and demonstrations to school and community groups.

Without hobby beekeepers in towns and rural areas it is likely that backyard gardening would be very much diminished and the benefit of fresh home grown food and a healthy and pleasurable hobby would be taken from Australian families. In our town there are about 15 community gardens where committed gardeners band together in a healthy social activity which also provides families and friends with fresh produce. They are unlikely to be able to continue if there are few beehives left in the area to pollinate their vegetables and fruit.

Commercial and hobby beekeeping is already under stress from the impact of diseases such as American Foul Brood and Small Hive Beetle and it is threatened by the possible arrival of Varroa destructor in Australia. The addition of the Asian Bee, an aggressive predator on honeybee hives, will certainly make beekeeping more time consuming and expensive. It has the potential to completely destroy beekeeping, both as an industry and a hobby. Many hobby beekeepers would be likely to give up the fight to keep hives alive in these circumstances.

The Association is also concerned that many commercial operations will be unable to continue under this additional threat which would mean the loss of livelihood to the beekeepers concerned and the loss to the Australian public of our beautiful Australian honey with its distinctive flavours. The Association is also concerned about the potential loss of the substantial export market Australia has for our tasty, chemical free honey and our export market for package bees and queens.

The Association is concerned beyond our beekeeping involvement with the potential grave damage that Asian bees would do to Australia. We are concerned about conservation issues for our native animals including native bees that may potentially be driven away from nectar bearing plants by an aggressive invader. Many native animals such as sugar gliders and birds are dependant on nectar for food and on tree hollows for homes. Asian bees will compete aggressively for these resources with the potential for native animals to be threatened or even whole species to be destroyed.

The Association believes that the aggressive nature and swarming propensity of Asian Bees will damage the amenity of Australian life in areas invaded by them. Numerous small hives of aggressive bees would make many outdoor activities difficult and possibly dangerous. The cost to the Australian community of exterminating these hives constantly would be considerable and ongoing. Homes and public buildings are also likely to have invasions in wall and roof cavities. Individuals and all levels of government will have to bear ongoing costs of control of Asian Bees

The Association is also concerned about the possible loss of our home grown food supply due to lack of honeybees to pollinate crops and gardens. At present most of our fresh food is grown in Australia with the protection of good legislation to control the use of chemicals which might endanger human health. The loss of honey bees would force our country into a situation where we became an importer of our basic food. This would mean that we had to rely on overseas suppliers for the quality, variety and quantity of food we can access. The Association believes that the economic and health impacts of this situation would damage our country. We do not believe Australia should accept this possibility without a very determined fight.

We ask the Senate Committee to recommend the continuation of the fight to eradicate the Asian Bee because we believe that the consequences of giving up are seriously detrimental to the Australian economy, biodiversity, health and social amenity of life.

Lyn Shiels

For the Beekeepers Association of the ACT Inc.

PO Box 1482

Woden ACT 2606

Telephone (02) 62862421

enquiries@actbeekeepers.asn.au