

Committee Secretary

Senate Rural and regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

PO Box 6100 Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

**Re: Inquiry into the future of the beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia**

The document *More than Honey* is primarily focused in supporting the existing honey industry in Australia, for example; Twenty three of the twenty five recommendations are concerned with the support of existing honey producers. The author of this document intends to focus specifically on the future of the apiculture industry as a whole, in terms of a sustainable world leadership position. The author provides specific observations from a Victorian perspective and Victorian Government documents.

This document addresses the terms of reference in particular, sections;

*(b) current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally, and its future sustainability, and*

*(f) any related matters.*

In 2012 the Parliament of Victoria conducted two inquiries into aspects of the future of agriculture in this State. These are:

*(a) The Rural and Regional Committee (RRC) Inquiry into the Capacity of the Farming Sector to attract and retain young farmers and respond to an ageing workforce and*

*(b) The Education and Training Committee (ETC) Inquiry into Agricultural Education and Training.*

Both these documents highlight contradictions where Government's policies may have exacerbated the issues under investigation. Recommendation 39 of RRC (pp.xxx) for example, states" that the State Government examine the delivery of extension services in Victoria with the aim of identifying gaps in service". In practice the Government of Victoria is progressively reducing the level of extension services to the Honey Industry by reducing the number of specialist extension officers.

Statements contained in the abovementioned reports also tend to reflect a common view amongst many parliamentarians who believe that market forces will eventually encourage businesses to provide solutions to industry needs. The RRC report (pp.xix) for example, in referring to the absence of defined pathways into the various agricultural sectors, makes the statement" that it is the responsibility of the farming sector to develop and promote these pathways for young Victorians". There is currently no defined pathway into the apiculture industry. There are no tertiary level institutions providing courses in apiculture and those TAFE institutions that provide learning in beekeeping direct their curriculum toward hobby beekeepers. The most common mode of entry into the Honey industry is the medieval practice of familial succession. Although in many respects it might be easier to enter the apiculture industry than say, broad acre farming due to the lower capital investment required, there appears to be little evidence of young people entering the industry and this might be attributed to the lack of pathways.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Australia had a vision to diversify away from an agrarian economy to one driven by technology. Australia was touted as the clever country, however in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is evident that there are many countries that are much better placed to succeed in these areas due to large population bases and cultures as equally passionate about learning as Australia is. Australia is currently moving (read aimlessly drifting) away from manufacturing, without a clear view as to what Australia's strengths are. It is the author's view that Australia could well enhance its agricultural position through a concerted whole economy approach. A complementary technological eminence however, is required, and in order to achieve this, investment in research and training is a prerequisite. The ETC inquiry (pp xxiv) did recognise that in order to provide a framework into the future "A system of agricultural education and training that supports a world-class agriculture sector into the future" is required.

The RRC inquiry (pp xx) further emphasised the importance of technological advancement in agriculture stating that "Research and development is crucial to developing innovative farming methods that drive productivity". The Honey industry may not have the resources to drive this development at the present time; however a collaborative approach may be a solution. The RRC inquiry (pp xx) tends to concur with this view, stating "that productivity in the farming sector can be increased through improved collaboration in a whole of economy approach". Many overseas countries provide for example, tertiary courses in apiculture. A recent study tour of China by an Australian Trade Commission revealed that China has Universities devoted to apiculture.

With the predominance of pollination as a major industry activity and the associated transport of hives spanning the length and breadth of Australia, combined with the threats of international pests and diseases the future direction of apiculture is more likely to be National, rather than Regional, consequently the recommendation of the ETC committee (pp xxx) which states "that the agricultural sector, the education and training sector and the Victorian Government establish a Victorian agricultural education and training council" is somewhat limiting. The author suggests that this concept may be better addressed on a National level.

It is quite evident in a global economy all businesses need to be at least cognisant with the latest technology and operatives must employ best practice. This can only be achieved with effective research, development and training programs. Sadly the apiculture industry in Australia cannot boast world leadership in these areas. One might hope that the current Senate inquiry may be the springboard to launch Australia in the right direction.

Yours Faithfully,

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#### References

Inquiry into the Capacity of the Farming Sector to Attract and Retain Young Farmers and Respond to an Ageing Workforce (Parliament of Victoria 2012)

Inquiry into Agricultural Education and training (Parliament of Victoria 2012)