



TASMANIAN FARMERS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

TFGA Submission – Senate Inquiry into Bumblebee Population in Tasmania

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

The total Tasmanian gross state product (GSP) was \$23.9 billion for the 2012 year. The GVP of agriculture, forestry and fishing collectively amounted to almost 9% of this total – before input supply services and value-adding, which is well above that for the nation as a whole.

The TFGA is grateful for the opportunity to make comment to the Senate inquiry into ‘The risks and opportunities associated with the use of the bumblebee population in Tasmania for commercial pollination purposes’.

The importance of beekeeping and pollination to agriculture, including horticulture, cannot be over-estimated. Those producers who use the services of pollinators appreciate the value and importance of effective pollination to their crops.

Pollination Australia has estimated that pollination services to the 35 most important honeybee-dependent agricultural and horticultural crops was valued at \$1.7 billion in 1999 - 2000.

This fact, along with the diversified enterprise structure of most Tasmanian farms, means that the majority of our farmers would be adversely affected by any pest or disease impacting on the bee population.

Recent research indicates that the Tasmanian bumblebee population is inbred but obviously not critically so. It is suspected that the entire population of *Bombus terrestris* in Tasmania is descended from a single fertilised queen.

Under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, it is illegal to possess or use bumblebees because they were not legally imported.

The Invasive Species Council states; If the EPBC Act is amended to allow the possession and use of illegally or accidentally imported species, that will create a huge perverse incentive to illegally introduce bumblebees to the mainland (and also other invasive species that may have commercial value).¹

¹ Invasive Species Council (2015), Bumblebees in Tasmania – Pollination Push.

Some of the concerns TFGA has with bumblebees, include:

- There may be an increase in the seed production of introduced plants that currently lack an efficient pollinator;
- Increased competition with native nectar feeding fauna;
- Increased competition for commercial bees, which may see a decrease of pollen resource available for producing honey; and
- If new genetic material is imported, what the risks to the agricultural industry and Tasmanian environment will be, and what mitigation strategies need to be put in place to provide the appropriate level of protection.

With increasing investment in protected cropping production facilities in Tasmania, there is an opportunity to allow the use of bumblebees for protected cropping to increase efficiencies and production.

The TFGA believes that a cautious approach should be undertaken to consider the case for use of bumblebees as pollinators for protected cropping crops in Tasmania. With the limited amount of current research been undertaken there is an opportunity to undertake research on bumblebees to provide guarantees that any change to legislation is favourable for all stakeholders.

Please contact the TFGA if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Peter Skillern
Chief Executive Officer
3rd March 2016