

31 March 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: rat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport Inquiry into the Science Underpinning the Inability to Eradicate the Asian Honeybee

The Association welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committees (the 'Committee') on Rural Affairs and Transport Inquiry into the Science Underpinning the Inability to Eradicate the Asian Honeybee. Our submission focuses on providing information that will assist the Committee in assessing the cost benefit of eradication of the Asian honeybee.

The NSW Farmers' Association (the 'Association') is Australia's largest state farming organisation representing the interests of the majority of commercial farm operations throughout the farming community in NSW. Through its commercial, policy and apolitical lobbying activities it provides a powerful and positive link between farmers, the Government and the general public.

The Association has recently established an Apiarist Section within the Association and currently has 32 beekeeper Members. However, the majority of our Members benefit from the incredible job done by the European honeybee to pollinate their crops and pastures.

The Association supports the continuation of the Asian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) eradication program and asks that the Australian Government commit to further funding of the eradication program immediately.

The Association's policy is:

"That the Association lobby the Australian Government to reinstate the eradication program for Asian honeybee given the adverse impact it will have on the European honeybee, pollination in agriculture, and the honey and beekeeping industry including the loss of the Queen bee and package bees export market to the United States of America."

The Association policy was passed at a meeting of Executive Council 8 – 9 March 2011.

The Association notes that the Australian Honeybee National Management Group (AHB NMG) did not reach consensus and did not seek the opinion of the CSIRO when deciding on the feasibility to achieve eradication at their meeting on 31 January 2011.

It is critical that populations (wild and in managed hives) of European honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) are protected from threats (including Asian honeybee and Varroa mite) due to the role they have in the pollination of our crops and pastures. The Australian Government Pollination Program estimates that 65% of agricultural production in Australia relies on honeybees for pollination and that pollination services to agriculture are worth close to \$4 billion a year, meaning that even a 10% cut in production as a result of pests and diseases of honeybees would result in losses in excess of \$350 million a year.

In Australia 35 industries are dependent on honeybee pollination for most of their production¹, including apples, almonds, pears, avocados, sunflowers, cucumbers, melons and vegetable seed production. For many other crops honeybee pollination can increase yields, e.g. cotton, canola, pasture clovers. The Association draws the Committee's attention to Table 5.1 (Pollination responsiveness of selected crops – as a percentage of yield) in the RIRDC publication, *The Real Value of Pollination in Australia*².

Appendix 1 gives the pollination responsiveness (by biological pollination agents) of selected commodities (as percentage of yield) and their gross value of production (Australia and NSW). These figures will assist in determinations of the cost benefit of eradication of the Asian honeybee. The figures indicate that if populations of European honeybee were impacted by pests and diseases such as Asian honeybee and Varroa mite, Australian agriculture is likely to suffer enormous economic losses. It is stated in *The Real Value of Pollination in Australia*² that "a deterioration in the disease status of honeybees in this country could have a dramatic impact on the prosperity and prospects for the producers of pollination-responsive commodities".

In the article *Exotic pests pose pollination threat*³ Louise Lawrence and Denis Anderson (CSIRO Entomology) say that priority must be given to protecting the European honeybee as the major source of crop pollination as there are no viable alternatives at the moment. Additionally, they say that Australian farmers mostly rely on wild populations of honeybee to pollinate their crops. In their article Lawrence and Anderson provide a glimpse of what could happen should the Asian honeybee arrive in Australia by describing what has happened in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (the article was written prior to the Asian honeybee detection in Cairns): Asian honeybee has killed off European honeybee, drones have mated with European honeybee queens leading to poor quality queens and weaker colonies and it has become a general pest around human communities and European honeybee apiaries.

The Australian honeybee industry had an estimated gross value of honey and beeswax production (GVP) of \$75 million in 2007-08.

Queen bee and package bee exports are worth approximately \$7 million per year and growing. Exports are sent to California to assist with the pollination of almonds; while the almond industry has been growing in California the number of available managed bee colonies has been declining. If the Asian honeybee eradication program is terminated this export market will be lost; for one beekeeper from Blayney, NSW this represents the closure of his \$2 million per year export bee business.

The Association is concerned that if Asian honeybee is allowed to enter Australia freely then it is only a matter of time before Varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*) reaches Australia, and this is likely to result in the rapid demise of European honeybee colonies. This is because Asian honeybee is the natural host to the Varroa mite.

¹ 'Pollination Aware: The real value of pollination': Pollination Aware Fact Sheet.

² 'Pollination Aware: The Real Value of Pollination in Australia': RIRDC Pub. No. 10/081, August 2010.

³ 'Exotic pests pose pollination threat': Farming Ahead, January 2007, No. 180.

The cost benefit of protecting native bees, animals and birds from population decline and associated ecological services also needs to be considered; Asian honeybee is likely to compete with them for food resources and displace them from their shelter.

The Association thanks the Committee for considering our comments in the preparation of their inquiry report.

Yours sincerely

Charles Armstrong
PRESIDENT



Appendix 1. The pollination responsiveness (by biological pollination agents) of selected agricultural commodities (as percentage of yield) and their gross value of production (both Australia and NSW).

Commodity	Responsiveness (%)²	Gross Value⁴ (Australia) \$m	Gross Value (NSW)⁴ \$m
Almonds	100	93.7	6.7
Apples	100	542.7	75.6
Apricots	70	31.9	1.2
Avocados	100	109.8	19.5
Blueberries	100	67.0	57.0
Canola	15	1011.4	126.9
Cherries	90	125.9	39.6
Cotton	10	650.8	325.6
Cucumbers	100	28.2	4.3
Kiwi fruit	80	10.2	1.0
Macadamia nuts	90	49.1	33.0
Mandarins	30	120.0	4.0
Mangoes	90	121.9	0.1
Nectarines	60	102.3	13.2
Oranges	30	255.0	111.8
Peaches	60	100.2	17.3
Pears (excl. Nashi)	50 – 100	116.1	0.8
Pumpkins	100	68.8	14.5
Rockmelons	100	65.2	19.9
Soybeans	10 – 60	44.2	20.9
Sunflower	30 – 100	38.5	26.5
Vegetables for seed	100	120.4	8.9
Watermelons	70	94.1	19.4

⁴ 'Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced', 2008/09: ABS, 7503.0