



AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

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SUBMISSION TO

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE BIOSECURITY BILL 2014 AND RELATED BILLS

Submission prepared on behalf of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc.

Introduction

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc. (AHBIC) is the peak body for beekeeping in Australia. Its members are:-

Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc.
New South Wales Apiarists Association Inc.
Victorian Apiarists Association Inc.
Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc.
South Australian Apiarists Association Inc.
Western Australian Farmers Federation Inc. – Beekeepers Section
Honey Packers and Marketeers Association of Australia Inc.
Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association Inc.
National Council of Pollination Associations Inc.
Associated Groups

Biosecurity has an enormous effect on the beekeeping industry. As an example, Australia is the last major beekeeping country that does not have the varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*). Keeping this mite out of Australia is of vital importance to the beekeeping industry.

There have, unfortunately, been three major quarantine breaches in recent years that have had a dramatic effect on the beekeeping industry.

1. The introduction of chalkbrood (*Ascophera apis*) in 1993.
2. The introduction of the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*) in 2002
3. The introduction of the Asian bee Java genotype (*Apis cerana*) in 2007 to mainland Australia. AHBIC does not consider the Asian bee Java genotype arriving in Torres Strait in 1992-93 as a quarantine breach.

The comments made in this submission are of a general nature and may best be addressed in the regulations but AHBIC thought it best to introduce them at this Inquiry stage in case there is a need to address these issues in legislation.

Changing of conditions of entry

Whilst it recognised that the Department of Agriculture has the power to set the conditions of entry of things such as queen bees, there needs to be some changes made to ensure that if changes are made they can be justified.

As an example, queen bees can be imported into Australia provided the necessary paperwork is prepared and the queen bees go through the quarantine facility using the approved protocols. Recently the importation of queen bees was suspended. The reason given was the discovery of colony collapse disorder (CCD) in the USA. When AHBIC enquired as to why the suspension was put in place, no one could say who requested the suspension, what steps were taken to ensure it was necessary and no consultation took place.

AHBIC would submit that the Biosecurity Bill legislation or the regulations need to have in place a protocol for ensuring that these changes or suspensions are justified. There needs to be:-

- (a) Consultation with the peak industry body to explain why the change or suspension is necessary
- (b) Advise who requested the change or suspension
- (c) Any scientific advice that has been sought be available to the peak body

Whilst biosecurity consideration should be foremost, unjustified changes could lead to people resorting to illegal importations and this will have a devastating effect on our industry should a pest or disease be introduced via the illegal importation.

Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis

AHBIC recognises that a Biosecurity Risk Analysis (BIRA) is necessary before any new material can be imported.

AHBIC also notes in the Explanatory Notes that the Minister for Agriculture is proposed to have the power to order a BIRA to be carried out. Whilst this is a welcome power, AHBIC would submit that there should be a procedure for processing BIRA's that is timely.

As an example, an Import Risk Analysis for the importation of drone bee semen was commenced in 2002. It was listed as high priority and it was said that it should take 18 months to two (2) years. The technical issue paper was released in August 2002.

In 2006 enquiries showed that it was not yet completed, was said to maybe take several years and a progress report was issued.

In May 2008 the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources issued the More Than Honey Report. Recommendation 12 said "*The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry direct Biosecurity Australia to complete the import risk analysis for drone semen by the end of 2008.*" There were several submissions to this Inquiry complaining about the lack of finality of the IRA.

Several enquiries were made of the Department over the next few years with the answer that it was now not a priority despite it being a high priority in 2002 and in 2006 a priority.

On 16 July, 2014 the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee issued a report on the "Future of the beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia." Recommendation 7 said "*The committee recommends that the Commonwealth government give urgent consideration to facilitating efforts by the industry to import suitable varroa-resistant breeding material into Australia, subject to stringent biosecurity safeguards being put in place.*"

This recommendation was made as a result of many submissions pointing out the lack of progress on the drone bee semen importation IRA.

Recently AHBIC has made a submission to have the Import Risk Analysis reconsidered.

So it can be seen that over 12 years has elapsed since the original technical paper was issued.

AHBIC would submit that there needs to be some legislation or regulation that ensures that once an Import Risk Analysis is commenced it is finished in a reasonable time frame. Failure to do this could mean an industry is disadvantaged and it also tempts illegal importations.

Pratiques

Pratiques are a useful tool in preventing the incursion of certain pests and diseases into Australia. There have been several instances where exotic bees were picked up on ships prior to their arrival in Australia.

Whilst not fool proof, pratiques serve the purpose of making the ship's Captain at least make some observations for exotic pests and diseases. AHBIC would submit that there should be a look at ways of strengthening this pratique process so as to again increase our biosecurity.

Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc.
16 January, 2015