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Secretary: <i>Colin Post</i>

Gells Honey Maryborough

Inquiry into the future development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry

1: It current and future prospects

The honey industry has been a very quite and stable industry for many years however since the role of land managers and Government have focus more on environmental issues to appease the green element our industry has suffered.

The honey industry is solely reliant on access to public land for the bulk of the honey that is produced in this country without a reliable access policy for access the honey industry will diminish.

The honey industry has the privilege of being able to harvest a produce from a source that no one else can harvest and yet no one can see what has been harvested, we as an industry can produce a product and leave no trace of what has been produced.

Private land usage is of a very small proportion of the honey that is produced each year, also public land ownership changes on a regular basis so reliability of land is very critical to us.

Future of the industry is there for reliant on access to the public lands for bee health and honey production and in growing market, pollination.

Our business has been growing for a number of years as I am the forth generation of beekeeper in our family and now my son has now left school to try his hand at beekeeping , however without security of access to public lands his future will be diminished.

Also some sort of schooling is required for this industry if it is to survive in today's world as there is very limited classes for beekeeping and recognition of this calibre of skills that are required of a beekeeper to survive.

2: Its role in agriculture and forestry.

Once again access is the key role here; there are ways which I believe that could help us in Victoria.

The industry has a good relation with the state forest system however this cannot be said about the Parks rangers or officers, as the policy in parks at the moment is that no commercial activities in the Park system, so bee sites are becoming very difficult to adhere by.

All we ask for is place hives in the forest system as we have done for many years, as there is no conclusive evidence that commercial honey bees are detrimental to the environment we should be able to practice beekeeping in the forest for the few weeks that are required to gather honey and keep the health of the bee hive in good condition for possible pollination services that seem to be on the increase.

The forest system has the ability to open up more country to the beekeeping sector if it wants to however the at this stage there is an unwilling approach to us.

Agriculture is reliant on us that is just beginning to surface as the growing Almond industry is solely reliant on our bees for nut production.

The farming sector has relied on our bees for many years, without that sector having any idea how this industry helped them ,this was through no fault of theirs more of just poor education through the years and our industry not having the ability to educate the public at large.

It is only in the past few years that the agricultural sector are beginning to appreciate the benefits from this industry has on there commodity, that paid pollination is starting to happen for our beekeepers.

The industry is desperately in search of research and field officers to help this industry survive in the present climate

3: Biosecurity issues

This is of great importance to this industry as we are one of the last countries to not have the most destructive beehive menace in the world.

This is Varroa mite there is a few species however we need none of them for once this mite enters our country a lot of food will increase in price as there will no longer be free pollination done from the wild colonies as there will be mass destruction of bee hives across the country until we learn to live with it as many other countries have done since its introduction.

However this industry will be relying on government assistance in helping the industry survive through this time of educating the apiarist on use of chemicals which is the only way to controls this mite, so no longer will Australia have the clean and green image that it currently holds up high .Without government assistance the industry will fall over.

So I believe there is a lot to be gained from maintaining and upgrading our surveillance that the industry has in place now with more assistance from all government agencies state and federal.

Local diseases that we have currently need to deal with more on a national approach rather than by each state doing their own thing as this is compromising the whole of the industry.

4: Trade issues

With current prices our industry is finding it hard to compete on a level playing find so to speak.

Our industry has had to spend a huge amount of capital to bring our equipment up to food grade standards and to have certificates for handling of food even though our food is of very low risk.

However overseas honey is not required to have the same checks and balances that our own honey is required to have.

There are many chemicals in honey from overseas that our industry is not allowed to use and is found in honey coming into this country however it is not seen to be of a concern to the food authority because of the low risk to human health however if it is found in Australian honey all hell breaks lose this is not what I call equal trade parameters.

5: The Impact of land managers and bushfires.

I think that much has already been covered in the first section as to the parks officers' attitude towards our industry in the system.

Bushfires is one where we will never have a system that will suit all parties however we must relies that the country has already changed from the times that management is trying to take it back to. This seems to be the underlying factor we do need to change with the times.

We need to preserve the forest as well as use it for development there is a fine line between the two but I am sure that can be met.

Having bees in the environment can only help the reproductive system of a lot of species that need insect pollination.

6: Research and development needs of the industry.

I believe that research is of most important to our industry as to find better resistance bees to the diseases that are currently out there and most of all the resistance to the Varroa mite that is waiting to enter Australia.

It disturbs me that the quarantine station has been sold for development reasons, this station has held the industry up for a long time with introducing new strains of blood lines to the honey producing sector for possible increases in honey yields, this station needs to be opened up again for vital genetics improvements and to hold stock which may be the carrier of diseases or pests.

Background

I come from a beekeeping family which has built this business up from years of work I being the forth generation.

We currently run around 1400 hives of bees trying to produce approximately 1200ton of honey per year in which is then sold to Capilano as we are shareholders of.

We currently supply 800 hives of bees for pollination to the almond industry.

We employ 2 staff members to help run the operation with the assistance still of my father so there are 4 people working this operation.

My son has just left school to start beekeeping so I hope that this inquiry will boost skills and training for this industry.

It has taken 30 years to get a suitable amount of forest sites to be able to cater for the operation that we now have this is a stable system that we know that we can produce honey if the forest if right , without sites honey production reduces due to available locations.

Regards Ken Gell
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