

INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY

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1. Current and Future Prospects:

The drought and bushfires have had a significant impact on the beekeeping industry. Whilst the drought has had an influence on honey production, the bushfires have had a far more devastating affect. The different species of flora are impacted differently due to different elevation, hardiness to name a few examples. Certain trees affected by the bushfires may not yield any honey for a period of between 3 to 10 years. This means that certain honey may not be available in large quantities for up to 10 years. The economic viability of the honey industry is extremely grim. Bee sites and all other government forest charges keep increasing in accordance with the CPI. Additionally the added high costs of motor vehicles and labour costs mean that the majority of beekeepers work alone. The average beekeeper cannot afford to employ labour, so it is of some concern to the industry as where the future lies and the generations of knowledge lost.

Market manipulation is also of concern. Capilano forced rival packers out of business and now determine the price of honey in conjunction with the dominating supermarkets of Coles and Safeway. The price of honey in 2007 is extremely low in comparison with 1987. Added to this, with their market manipulation, the major supermarkets are now importing honey from Argentina, China and Denmark and selling it at a lower price than the Australian honey.

2. Role in Agriculture and Forestry:

Beekeeping provides a vital role in both agriculture and forestry. In agriculture it provides pollination for crops such as canola and lucerne, fruits such as kiwifruit and almonds, vegetables such as pumpkin and zucchini. The pollination in agriculture is far ranging and essential. The Apiarist depends on the trees in the forest for the bee's survival, for honey and pollen, so that they can build up hive strength to pollinate the crops, fruits and vegetables.

3. Biosecurity Issues:

The greatest concern for the Australian Apiarist are biosecurity issues. The importation of honey and honey products, exotic diseases and foreign pests that are gradually being introduced into Australia and also into neighbouring countries, have the potential to decimate the Australian honey industry. In the past few years we have seen the introduction of numerous pests, such as the hive beetle which entered Australia in approximately 2000, and have an immediate and devastating affect on the beekeeping industry.

4. Trade Issues:

Due to the low export price and the cheap import price of honey, the Australian Apiarist has found the industry uneconomic. With Government subsidies in some countries, such as Argentina and Mexico, it causes Australian honey to be uncompetitive on the world market. Added to that, the high overheads such as wharf

charges and freight charges, the Australian Apiarist cannot compete with these countries.

5. Impact of Land Management and Bushfires:

This has been a subject of concern for some years now. It has been disappointing that in the past, management have chosen to ignore advice and concerns of beekeepers regarding both the issues of land management and bushfires. An example of this is the recent bushfires around Myhree and the clear felling at Strathbogie.

The various government departments appear to hold little respect for the local knowledge, or the expert opinion of a person who has worked their whole life, or indeed generations of families, in one industry. The Managers often display a complete lack of knowledge of differing species, their requirements and the different areas that one species grow in.

6. Research and Development Needs of the Industry:

There has not been enough research into the problems of the industry. Without research, development does not occur. The little research that has occurred in the past, often reaches a certain level and is not taken any further. The industry has also found that research is often repeated, but never taken any further or the developed, than the previous research. Past research appears to hit a "glass ceiling". An example of this is in the 1980's an economic survey was conducted and showed that the Apiary Industry was uneconomically viable. Had this research been taken further and strategies been developed, the industry may have been in a better position than it is today. Since the 1980's, the costs have increased and prices fallen and problems that survey identified have increased.

7. Existing Industry and Government Work That Has Been Undertaken for the Honey Been Industry:

As stated above, the Australian Apiculture industry often finds that Governments repeat any research into beekeeping. There appears to be little or no work undertaken to assist the Apiarist by the various Governments. For example the Government leases a bee site on government land that is often too close to tourist areas, tracks out of order and no access available. The Government do little or no maintenance on the bee sites and it is left up to the Apiarist to maintain it so that it is usable. There is little work being undertaken at this time and the reasons why are stated above.


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