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The Secretary
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission

Inquiry Into Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry

The submission herein is in response to the House of Representatives inquiry into the future development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry from New South Wales Apiarist's Association.

We seek to address the committee's request and include responses to:

- Current and Future prospects
- Role in Agriculture
- Bio Security Issues
- Trade Issues
- Impact of Land Management and Bush Fires
- Research and development
- Existing Industry and Government work

Current and Future Prospects:

Honey marketing within Australia has not been able to achieve the prices required to sustain the Industry. The clean green environment of Australia should enable producers to attract premiums from the market place.

The returns to producers as a percentage of retail price has declined dramatically over recent years. Honey is being sold at \$8.00-\$10.00/kilo but returns to producers is an average \$2.00/kilo.

There is some work being done by Industry with organics, in an attempt to gain higher prices for more of Australia's production. There could be work done by Industry with "energy life cycles" of honey production, promoting honey as a low energy cost product, giving it a distinct advantage over other sweeteners in both manufacturing and domestic consumption.

Medicinal and Therapeutic values of Australian honeys are emerging as a way of obtaining premiums for some of Australia's honey. There is research being carried out at present, but much more can be done if funds were available. This is a major contribution to society.

Commercial pollination is emerging as a larger part of the Honey Bee Industry with approximately 60-70,000 hives being used at present, with potential for 400,000 hives to be required just for Almond pollination alone over the next few years.

Commercial Queen Bee and Package Bee production is another emerging diversification within the Honey Bee Industry, some 45,000 packages and 60,000 queens were exported this year, with potential growth of between 10-20% / year over the next few years, provided Australian honey Bee genetics can keep pace with markets.

Royal Jelly, Pollen, and Propolis production are also small additional diversification ventures which could grow, depending on the economics (labour costs, returns etc.).

Recommendations:

* Industry requires promotion.

* Government to implement policy/pressure on supermarkets/processors to ensure producers receive a fair return for their product.

Role in Agriculture:

The value of Honey Bee production is in the range of

Honey: \$60 - 65 million

Pollination: \$2.5 – 3 billion

Queens: \$1- 1.2 million

Packages: \$4.5 – 5 million

The value of pollination to the community has been estimated at \$2.7 – 3 billion.

Both pollination value to the community and to beekeepers could increase expeditiously over the next few years, provided the Honey Bee Industry can have access to resources (ie floral, financial, labour) to grow to meet this demand.

Package Bee and Queen Bee exports can grow into the future, however, availability of Honey Bee breeding stock (genetics) and skilled labour could limit any growth.

Agricultural chemicals can have major impacts on the Honey Bee Industry.

Recommendations:

* Industry requires appropriate recognition and assistance by Governments. Eg access to resources and research funding.

Bio Security Issues:

Pests and diseases, both exotic and endemic could limit the Industry's' ability to meet the expected demands of the Agricultural sector, export potential and the community's expectations for fruit and vegetables.

Exotic incursions such as mites (Varroa, Tropilaepe, Tracheal), Apis Cerana, (Nosema Cerana), Bumble Bee, Apis Dorsata (an Asian Bee) will impact the Honey Bee Industry and increase costs dramatically for dependent industries.

Endemic pests and diseases do cause the Industry production and financial losses and in some cases can affect the Agricultural sector by diseases which may affect bees in certain areas, causing beekeepers to avoid those areas as disease clean up of hives is too expensive. (eg. American Foul Brood (AFB) in Macadamia Nut pollination areas on the North Coast of New South Wales).

Importation of hive products from most countries, now pose a risk to the Australian honey Bee Industry.

There is a great need to have a quarantine facility to replace Wallgrove for the safe import of genetic stock, thus reducing the risk of illegal imports of Queen Bees which would pose a risk of pests and diseases entering Australia.

Bio security must be effective and be ongoing to exclude known pests and diseases. Imported hive products (honey, pollen, propolis etc) must cease immediately. Agricultural chemicals can have serious effects on Honey Bees, and research needs to occur to identify and list their effects on honey Bees. (Neonicotinoids and micro-encapsulated sprays.)

Recommendations:

- *Ban importation of all hive products. (eg honey, pollen, propolis, royal jelly etc) unless irradiated.
- *Continue to update National Sentinel Hive Program.
- *Have a readiness plan in place for Varroa with management strategies based on New Zealand and USA experience with Varroa hive management.
- *Research into effects of Agricultural chemicals on the Honey Bees.
- *Replace Wallgrove quarantine facility.
- *Extra funding/training to ensure DPI has trained staff to help ensure Biosecurity issues can be carried out expediently

Trade Issues:

The risk of imported honey and other hive products is too great for Government to allow. The importance of a viable Honey Bee Industry within Australia must be uppermost in Government minds during trade negotiations with other countries.

Recommendations:

- * Labelling laws need addressing.
- *Standards developed for domestic honey.
- * Accreditation of audit standards.
- * Ban imports of all hive products (honey, pollen, propolis etc.) unless irradiated.

Impact of Land Management / Bush Fires:

Changes to land management are set to have some dramatic effects on the sustainability of the Honey Bee Industry. Major resources (State Forests) have undergone management change (NPWS) over the past few years. Some of the policies relating to honey bee access (especially in Queensland), which has a sunset clause of 2024 to exclude managed hives, will greatly reduce the resource base. These forested areas are the Honey Bee Industry's rest and recuperation areas where bees can be placed out of Agricultural chemical danger. These areas contain the main resources for production of "organic honey" in which Australia could lead the World.

The tenure of bee sites (given the importance of the Honey Bee Industry to the whole community) should be given a higher priority, and access to resources, of the (especially Government managed Lands) Honey Bee Industry should be guaranteed to the Industry with no reduction of access to resources.

The Honey Bee Industry will shortly have developed an EMS type document included in a National Code of Practice which will ensure the Honey Bee Industry's compliance with the policies of Land Managers, and identify the environmental sustainability of the Honey Bee Industry.

Management for bush fires has changed along with overall management as vast areas of Forestry is changed to Conservation Areas This has caused major loss of Honey Bee resources over the past few years and cannot continue. Forested land management policies and hence practices must change.

Due to the exclusion of stock and timber harvesting of these converted areas, fuel loads increase dramatically, and given the drier years Australia seems to be experiencing, massive bush fires are devastating millions of hectares each year of, primarily, honey bee resources. (Pilliga Scrub 150.000 hectares, Victoria over 1 million hectares). Country burnt like this will take 12 – 15 years to recover, before flowering.

Recommendations:

- *Have limited time managed grazing in all but the highest levels of conservation.
- *Have cool winter time hazard reduction (fuel reducing) burns.
- * Maintain all roads and strategic tracks in forested lands for fire access.
- * Promote the Code of Practice (EMS).
- *Allow Honey Bee access to Conserved areas.
- *Have honey Bee resources categorised as a Natural Resource.

Research, Development, and Education:

Because the Honey Bee Industry is a small industry both demographically and financially, yet contributes so much to society, funds for research, development and education will need to be augmented by groups other than the Honey Bee Industry (eg Horticulture, Agriculture and Governments). Linkages workshop identified the need for dependent Industries/Government to be involved in assisting Honey Bee Industry with research, development and education.

Training should also be extended to Government employees (DPI staff) to better service the Honey Bee Industry. State DPI budgets have reduced the number of dedicated Honey Bee Industry staff (extention, regulatory) in recent years, disadvantaging the Honey Bee Industry.

Research over time, proves to return its costs in benefits and research may find ways to eliminate some of our worst pests and diseases (Varroa).

Education is emerging as a must have, for the Honey Bee Industry. If the industry is to continue into the future, young people must be trained to take on the role of Apiarists, Scientists, Researchers, Industry Extension. The Honey Bee Industry is undergoing great changes.

Industry has worked with Education and Training to develop Competency Standards for skill based training, however the process is stalled and requires course material to be added and the training package released, promoted and supported by both Industry and Government.

AHBIC has initiated a Queen Bee Improvement Program for the production of disease resistant stock, higher productivity, and having resistance from pests. The program will require financial assistance from all beneficiaries (Industry sectors reliant on pollination and government).

Education of the public and Governments requires funding. It has been suggested that a promotional levy be struck, however given the financial position of the Industry this may be difficult to achieve and would require assistance from other sectors.

Education of the general public is perhaps as important as training young beekeepers. Both the community and Government need to be made aware of the value of the honey bee to society.

Training schemes are being prepared, but they must get into the field and be supported by Government.

Recommendation:

- *Skills training courses must be supported by Government.
- *Promote the benefits of Honey Bees to the community.
- *DPI funding/training.

Existing Industry and Government Work for Industry:

Access Workshop

Queen Bee Improvement Program –	Industry/Federal
Partnership Program -	Federal
Code of Practice (EMS) –	Industry/Federal
Linkages Workshop -	Federal
Quality Assurance (Beequal).-	Industry
OH &S Training –	Industry/ State
DPI Queen Rearing -	State
Disease and Pest Control -	Industry/Federal/State
Chainsaw Courses –	Industry
Extension dissemination of information -	State
Disease Response (Aus Vet) -	Industry/Federal
Research (HBRDC –RIRDC) -	Industry/Federal
National Sentinal Hive Program -	Industry/Federal/State
National Residue Survey (NRS) -	Industry/Federal
Export/Import Control (AQUIS)-	Federal