Inquiry into the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry

The Research and Development Needs of the Industry

At present, the funding situation is inadequate. The funding is provided from levies on honey production. This can vary greatly from year to year due to climatic and seasonal variations, which leads to an unstable research base. There needs to be a separate and stable stream of funding provided by the Government for the future development and safeguarding of the Australian Bee Industry. As well as receiving funding from the Government, it would be appropriate for other industries that rely on bees for pollination to contribute to funding initiatives. This will benefit all parties.

There are a number of areas that desperately need funding to provide a base for the future of the Honeybee Industry, and reliant industries. These include:

Breeding Scheme

Funding should be provided for a breeding scheme that will improve the quality of the existing stock in Australia. Another facet of this breeding scheme will be to develop and establish a gene-pool which has increased resistance to various bee diseases currently affecting our industry, as well as safeguarding us from future incursions of pests eg. *Varroa destructor*. The flow-down affect of improved bee stock would benefit honey producers, pollinators, and the export live bee market.

Training and Research Centre

A training and research centre would help to increase the knowledge of existing beekeepers and provide a focal point for attracting newcomers to the industry. The Honeybee industry needs to attract a younger workforce to address the ageing beekeeper population. This could be provided as an additional component to various Agricultural and Horticultural degrees throughout Australia. A similar unit could be available at TAFE colleges. This facility should be encouraged at these institutions as a way of achieving a younger workforce for the future development of the Australian Honeybee Industry. At present there is no training provided at any tertiary institution.

In addition, Australia has been blessed in recent years with a number of world-renowned Honeybee research scientists. Their status could be used to raise the profile of such a centre of excellence, and provide global research linkages. This centre could provide year round research programs, attract research scientists and industry leaders, as well as generating the possibility of overseas funding. An example of this has been seen recently with the EU funding of German scientists undertaking Small Hive Beetle research at UWS Hawkesbury.

Scholarships could also be made available for advanced students of Horticulture, Agriculture, Entomology and Genetics, from Australia and overseas. This would spark an interest in bees and attract intelligent newcomers to the industry.

The Creation of a Pollination Industry

The industry needs to establish the value of pollination by managed bee colonies to particular crops, including Almonds, Stone-Fruit, Pome Fruit, and Canola. These crops are of major importance to the Australian economy, and Australian beekeepers need to receive due recompense for the value of their services. Industry standards need to be set in place, with co-operation from all parties involved.

Bio-Security Issues

The main issue facing the Australian beekeeping industry at present is the introduction of parasitic mites eg. *Varroa Destructor*. These mites have caused havoc worldwide and we are in the extremely fortunate position of not yet being affected by this problem.

The consequences of *Varroa* entering Australia would be disastrous for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will swiftly wipe out the feral bee population that many primary industries rely on for free pollination. This would lead to an increase in the cost of commercial honeybee pollination, and a subsequent rise in food prices. This has shown to be the case in the USA, and more recently in New Zealand.

The current boom in live bee exports is due primarily to the fact that we have healthy mite-free honeybee stock. The ability of Australian beekeepers to supply replacement colonies for overseas commercial pollination has enormous potential at present. This trade advantage would be lost if *Varroa* becomes established.

In addition, we are at present capable of supplying a chemical free honey (and other related bee products) to a discerning market both here and overseas. The current trend of consumers worldwide is towards buying 'organic' and chemical free produce. If *Varroa* enters Australia, beekeepers will need to start treating their hives with miticides, thereby greatly reducing our competitive advantage on the world market and the overall value of Australia honey and bee products.

Border security is of vital importance to the beekeeping industry to prevent the introduction of pests such as *Varroa*. There needs to be an adequate response for dealing with *Varroa* in the case of a breach in our first line of defence. The reply should be swift and thorough. Having a highly efficient and professional team trained in the correct response could save the beekeeping and associated industries millions of dollars in the ongoing management of *Varroa* and its impact.

Adequate compensation must be made available to any beekeeper that suffers loss of hives and income as a result of an introduction. If hives need to be destroyed in an effort to control any initial incursion, compensation is necessary for a number of reasons. If this is advertised in the beekeeping industry, beekeepers will be

more inclined to report any suspicious symptoms in the hive. This will hasten the initial discovery of *Varroa*, and help Quarantine services in their duties.

There is great concern in the beekeeping community about the capabilities of Australian Quarantine to properly prevent and manage an outbreak. This outlook is a result of recent past failures to properly address the introduction of Small Hive Beetle.

The structure and capabilities of Bio-Security services is inadequate and needs to be reviewed. Currently AQIS contracts State DPI offices to carry out its Bio-Security duties, and at present there are not enough resources available for these agencies to carry out this function.

In the case of the introduction of SHB, NSW DPI failed at every stage in dealing with this issue. To begin with, there were no staff trained to identify SHB which resulted in a 4 month delay in any initial response. Once it was formally identified, there was no clearly defined 'plan of action'. As if to cover their poor response, NSW DPI issued misleading information on the potential severity of SHB, causing confusion in the beekeeping industry and further hampering the control of SHB. There was also no clearly defined plan for compensation if the destruction of a beekeepers hives were necessary to limit the spread of SHB.

An enquiry into the gross failings of NSW DPI could have provided valuable information, and established a framework for the management of future incursions. We feel that Bio-Security is too important an issue to be left to the resources of State agencies. A separate Federal body needs to be established to manage such important issues.

Regards,

Frank Malfroy
Beeline Queens & Honey

Lewin Goodwin-Brickhill
Beeline Queens

Tim Malfroy
Malfroy's Gold Australian Honey, Honeycomb, & Beeswax