


Amateur Beekeepers Society
of South Australia Inc.
Beekeeping – “A Honey of a Hobby”

Submission No:17.....
Date Received:25-5-07.....
Secretary:.....

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

INQUIRY INTO RURAL SKILLS TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Inquiry Secretary
Bill Pender

Dear Mr Bill Pender,

Attached is the submission from the Amateur Beekeepers Society of SA, relating to the above inquiry. Thank you for offering the members of the Amateur Beekeepers Society of SA the opportunity to express their concerns in the form of the enclosed submission.

Yours sincerely



Robert Beer
President
Amateur Beekeepers Society of SA.

Ph. (08) 8556 0162

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Its current and future prospects.

- * Currently the viability of this Industry is seriously jeopardised by fragmentation. Due to a lack of standards across state boundaries, a lack of standards common to the respective state government instrumentalities, and fragmentation between industry groups within the state of SA.
- * The financial sustainability of the industry is at risk due to the pressure being applied by supermarket chains continuing to import cheap honey into Australia.
- * Due to the increasing average age of beekeepers and the decrease of numbers in the next generation, we are being faced with the same number of hives being managed by fewer beekeepers. This scenario has the potential of lowering management practices at the risk of disease.
- * A Strategic Plan for the future needs to focus on such issues as financial viability, recruitment and skills training, being able to meet the needs of associated horticultural groups ie. pollination.
- * All governments should be supporting the industry financially and encouraging agricultural and horticultural groups to practice principles of biodynamic and organic management. These principles will in the long term enhance productivity, minimise water consumption, and assist in maintaining a sustainable environment.
- * The future aim of this Australian industry should be to produce a product which exceeds best practice world standards.

2. Its role in agriculture and forestry.

- * Agricultural and Horticultural Industries need to be well acquainted with their financial inter-dependence on good pollination, most especially when dependant on insect pollination. They also need to realise the value adding benefit of supplementing insects with crop production that has been considered as only a wind pollinated crop.
- * The apiary industry needs to value and understand its importance in being able to provide a pollination service to the agricultural and horticultural industries.

- * In the past some horticultural producers have considered feral or unmanaged colonies of bees all that is required for pollination. The future and eminent incursion of Varroa mite will bring an end to this unpaid resource.
- * Horticultural groups most especially orchardists in hilly terrain, when planning a layout of their orchard need to factor in the need for pollination and accessibility of vehicles to drop off and pick up hives.
- * There needs to be a contractual arrangement between the recipient of a pollination service and the provider of the bees to provide this essential service.

3. Biosecurity issues.

- * All governments in Australia need to be vigilant in the protection of the combined agricultural and horticultural production of food, understanding that approximately 1/3rd of our consumable food is pollinated by one source or another. The incursion of an exotic pest or disease would seriously place at risk the potential of the honey bee to maintain its role as a reliable pollinator, and so jeopardise the productivity of the Australian food chain.
- * The Australian Government guarantees and financially supports, along with the combined agriculture, horticultural and beekeeping industries; the long term future of the honey bee quarantine service currently located at the Eastern Creek Quarantine Facility, as a matter of urgency.
- * There needs to be a combined approach between all Australian governments and all players in the agricultural and horticultural industries when funding is approved for the research of alternative sources of pollinators especially when it involves insects and most especially when it involves the importation of alternative varieties of insects for pollination.
- * The irreversible impact to industries and eco-systems due to negligent and incomplete research needs to be foremost in our future planning. Individual industry groups must not be encouraged to investigate and research in isolation, as has happened in the past.
- * All players in this chain of research and development need to be ever vigilant to the potential risks and destruction of food crops which has occurred in, and is still impacting on the food production in countries like New Zealand, the USA, Great Britain and other European countries.

4. Trade issues.

- * The financial strangulation of the honey bee industry, impacts on the level of expertise and the attention to management which is given to sustaining an industry already struggling due to lack of numbers. Present participants are forced to supplement income by alternative sources, this can be most detrimental. The financial incentive for new participants to come into the industry is already eroded.
- * Current honey prices do not reflect the increases comparable to the cost of living which has impacted over the last 5 years.
- * There is lack of understanding between governments and industry planners when it comes to understanding the role of commercial and amateur beekeepers ie. the 80 / 20 rule applies, and it becomes more difficult for a beekeeper with a 100 hives or less to sustain financially and maintain such management strategies as HACCAP programs.
- * We need to protect the Australian honey industry from either the importation of sub standard honeys for sale on supermarket shelves, or the movement of honey through Australian packing plants on transit to alternative destinations as an Australian product or packed in Australia.
- * Public awareness of labelling laws to define clearly the content of the package being sold, also the country of origin or a listing of countries from where the honey has been sourced.
- * The combined honey bee industry needs to have an extensive program of public education on the qualities of honey, the naturalness of the pure product, and the medicinal attributes of hive products.

5. The impact of land management and bushfires.

- * There have been serious impacts due to the misuse or over use of chemicals for the control techniques of land management, or management practices for the production of food crops. Most especially orchardists in high density areas where there is a diversity of crop production and combined residential areas.

- * Land management practices need to reflect sound principles aligned to those of biodynamic and organic farming techniques. For the maintenance of land resources against such factors as over use and elements of soil erosion due to wind and flooding. Also for the maintenance of those insects not only beneficial but essential for maintaining the harmony of the environment.
- * The unnecessary clearing of remote or in accessible areas of land for alternative plantings of softwoods or wood chip products. Those responsible for land management need to understand the irreplaceable resources yielded from a Eucalypt tree 50 years or older, lost for ever when replaced with a vineyard, orchard, shed or housing estate as residential areas continue to creep out into rural areas.
- * Access to areas under the control of the NPWS need to be shared and areas restricted for specific use.
- * In SA beekeepers have been an essential resource in areas of NPWS as both active participants of CFS and also providing the fringe benefit in times of emergency by having maintained roads giving access to approved apiary sites within the NPWS.

6. The research and development needs of the industry.

- * Identify and establish chemical free techniques necessary for the good management of the health of bee hives, in line with the principles of striving for an Australian standard of excellence in the production of a "clean green Australian honey."
- * As a vital Australian industry we must promote excellence in standards of production. The Australian standards need to exceed those of all other honey producing countries, to put Australia in the best possible situation of supplying honey to those countries who are the buyers, and potential buyers of our export markets.
- * There needs to be a "Centre of Excellence" in Australia for the training of all personnel within the industry. Training components ranging from topics such as necessary for: the future leaders of this industry, marketing, financial management, disease management, queen bee breeding. Providing skills which are transferable between states complimenting the overall agricultural and horticultural Australian industries.

- * There needs to be research and development of protocols which consider the impact to the overall Australian apiary industry when “fads and fancies,” take over at the detriment of production in other areas of the industry: eg. package bees being exported to meet other markets, to the detriment of pollinating our own crops, or to the detriment of our own honey production, justifying the need to import honey to meet the demands of our local market.

7. Existing industry and Government work that has been undertaken for the honey bee industry.

- * At the expense of time and the need to expound what has been said or written I wish to identify organisations who we as a group have interacted with in the past.
- * RIRDIC
- * PIRSA
- * AHBIC
- * AQIS
- * SAAA
- * SAFF
- * University of SA, Waite research establishment.