House Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Submission No:	53
Date Received:	25 May 2007
Secretary:	

Inquiry into the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry

Submission by Allan Baker, Ocean Farms, Shire of Gingin.

I am an apiarist based in the Lancelin Area, in the Shire of Gingin, trading as Kalamunda Apiaries. I have worked in the industry in New Zealand and Australia for 22 years. As well as producing honey and pollen for the Western Australian market I specialise in the production of genetically superior queens. I am currently developing a live queen product for export to the USA and elsewhere.

1 **Its current and future prospects**

The current prospects for the industry are poor. Production generally has declined for a range of economic, environmental and industry management reasons. As is also universal in rural industries, producers have been caught in a cost / price squeeze from the globalised market reducing the profitability to producers. The product has become commoditised in the name of competiveness.

The drought and poor genetic management of bee resources have had a significant impact on the national stocks and resulted in the import of bulk honey, a significant bio-security risk.

The future of the industry lies in the liberalization of honey production and marketing, cracking down on monopolistic behaviour restricting sales and marketing options, local product development and regional identification, a vast improvement in genetic quality, rigorous attention to bio-security issues and improved environmental management. The industry also needs marketing support for bee keeping produce for individual bee keeping businesses.

Industry Management

Quality assurance programs such as BeeQual are important and fully supported however they must be administered independently by people who do not have a personal business interest in the industry.

Access to land (ie.bee-keeping sites) is a significant issue for independent producers such as myself. More flexible leasehold arrangements over unallocated crown land would greatly assist. Ill informed Local Government bi-laws that relate to the keeping of bees also need to be reviewed.

Bee-keeping has an environmental impact and much of it occurs on public land. As such the industry should be responsible and accountable for the sustainable use of the natural resources upon which it depends. Currently the industry has a "head in the sand" attitude with respect to environmental issues. An environmental (Environmental Management System) needs to be introduced (complementing BeeQual on the food safety side) as a condition of access to apiary sites on crown lands.

Feral Honeybees are becoming a significant conservation issue, usurping tree hollows normally used by native wildlife including threatened species such as our Black Cockatoos. This problem has become more serious recently due in part to the impact of Canola crops on bee swarming behaviour and possibly on genetic changes in feral populations. Genetically poor domestic bees are also more likely to swarm and behave aggressively.

Living in the area for a number of years, I have removed over seven hundred colonies from all sorts of objects and situations. I have developed a passive method of extracting worker bees from wild hives in tree hollows thus eradicating the feral hives. I am now actively involved in programs to manage feral bees in important natural habitat areas using my knowledge of bee behaviour. This includes working with the Cockatoo Care Program, removing bees from tree hollows which are nesting areas for Cockatoos with Mr Ron Johnson from the Western Australian Museum.

2 **The role in agriculture and forestry**

As recent news from the USA has demonstrated, Honey Bees are an essential component of our agricultural systems as pollinators of numerous crops
This pollination is crucial to most food crops e.g. for quality and even sized fruit. Apiculture needs to be much more fully integrated with horticulture, forestry and broad-scale cropping systems. Such a system needs catchment level coordination.

In badly fragmented landscapes where natural pollinators have been lost Honey Bees may now be the only way that many native plants in remnant bush can reproduce.

3 **Bio-security issues**

It is important that all beekeepers across Australia are made aware that biosecurity is looking after their own business and livelihood and should properly informed and there should be surveillance technology for early detection if a problem arises.

The importation of foreign honey products for blending with local production should cease.

4 **Trade issues**

Trade and export opportunities need to be made a lot more easily available to a lot more individual bee keeping businesses which will promote a larger Australian product range and help lift product quality.

5 **The impact of land management and bushfires**

The impact on land management and bushfires seems to be a major problem. Despite recent legislation to control the clearing of native vegetation important nectar and pollen resource areas continue to be lost. Resource security for the industry and the

needs of biodiversity conservation in general have not been taken seriously by our Department of Planning & Industry.

My involvement in the local area planning has been as representative on the Gingin Coastal Structure advisory group. Five years of arguing to protect both apiculture and natural environment on the Gingin Coast have produced disappointing outcomes.

Bushfires

Bushfires and burning policies have also had a significant impact on the bee-keeping resource in my area.

The fighting of fires has left much to be desired and the defence of active apiary sites during fires has not been a priority.

6 **The research and development needs of the industry**

The research into the industry needs to focus on genetic strains of honey bees with recessive genes to mites, virus and disease, also research into bee product analysis to highlight beneficial factors in honey bee products.

Research is also needed in development into the honey bee industry resources, planting more honey bearing species and more protection on bee keeping lands.

Allan Baker