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Secretary:	

## INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY

**ATT:** Bill Pender,  
Inquiry Secretary,

I wish to take this opportunity to express my concerns relating to the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry.

I am a second generation Beekeeper who started working with my father on leaving high school in the late nineteen sixties. My father had been keeping bees commercially since nineteen fifty five running approximately six hundred hives along with other Agricultural activities [mixed farming, sheep and cereal cropping]. My father employed one full time employee and on my arrival the operation was increased supporting three workers running approximately twelve hundred hives as well as a sizable farming operation. Through out the nineteen sixties, seventies and early eighties Beekeeping was the financial cornerstone of our business produced mainly from Honey and beeswax with little if any pollination income.

By the mid Nineteen Eighties things began to change as the effects of European Brood Disease, increased input costs and reduced returns as well as less regular and reliable honey crops began to impact on our viability. Over the last fifteen years we have had to restructure our operation to survive. Reducing labour costs improving hive management and maximizing returns by providing pollination services.

### Current and Future Prospects

Today we stand at the cross roads for our Honey Bee Industry. We can continue on down the present road and watch our Industry vanish into past history or turn the corner and with the support of Government, Agricultural sectors and the wider community, restore our Industry to a financially viable proposition. Without this support prospects for new people entering the Industry in the future are limited rendering present businesses owned by aging Beekeepers of little value to support retirement.

### Its Roll in Agriculture and Forestry

Honey Bees are an essential element in the pollination of most Agricultural and Horticultural crops needed to support the Human food chain. Sixty percent of Human foods rely on Honey Bees for pollination. Without Honey Bees food production and quality will be severely affected as has been demonstrated in other countries which are experiencing Honey Bee decline due to disease and parasitise.

Beekeepers can not operate on pollination alone as access to native Forests and honey sources is an important link in maintaining strong health beehives through out the year.

## Bio-security Issues

Over the last thirty years Honey Bees have been battling a continual stream of disease and now parasites [Small hive beetles] which have been uninvitingly introduced to our country. Unless a strong stand is taken through initially Quarantine and increased research to protect Honey Bees the future looks bleak. Varroa mites could be the last nail in the coffin for many aging Beekeepers as well as a total destruction of all feral colonies.

## Trade issues

Cheap honeys imported from countries that don't support a quality product process are undermining Australian honey prices reducing returns to producers. Packers also find that they are forced to meet prices dictated by the price of imported honey, when dealing with supermarket chains which have monopolized the retail sector.

## The impact of land management and bushfires

Beekeepers across Australia for decades have had to spend enormous amounts of time and money battling to justify our use of native forests for our Honey Bees. In all this time little if any detrimental affect on the environment has been attributed to Honey Bees.

Despite this we are loosing the battle being progressively shut out of native forests. Where we are still permitted to operate we are suffering a slow erosion of our bee sites through changing management practices and increased Human use.

Bushfires are a natural part of the Australian but Government land practices have contributed severely to the extent and severity of recent forest fires.

## Recommendations

### 1. Current and Future prospects

Recognize and promote the importance of Honey Bees to the health and prosperity of the Australian Food Industries.

Implementing the recommendation for the other terms of reference will greatly contribute to the outcome of recommendation 1.

### 2. Roll in Agriculture and Forestry

Conduct research into the impact of Honey Bees on the natural environment.

Fund programs to educate present and future Beekeepers in the management of Bees and Bee diseases.

Standardize land management practises across Australia.

### 3. Bio-security Issues

Expand and increase the monitoring of the Sentinel Hive program to all major ports.

Continue to fund and manage a Quarantine facility for the import of breeding stock for Queen Breeders and research.

Set up a national A.F.B. testing program.

Increase funding into research into on disease and parasite control.

#### 4. Trade Issues

Only allow honey imports that meet the same food standards that are required to be met by Australian Producers.  
Inquire into the price difference between retail prices and prices received by producers.

#### 5. Impacts of land management and bushfires

Immediately abandon the precautionary principle and allow all forests to be accessed by Bees.  
Improve access tracks to allow swift control of wild fires.  
Better management of controlled burns.

Once again I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to this inquiry.

I have spent all my working life Beekeeping, am a member of the V.A.A., a member and served on the executive of the North Eastern Apiarist Association. I am currently President.

This submission represents my own views.

I would be pleased if I could attend the public hearing being held in Wangarratta on July the 25<sup>th</sup>

Yours Sincerely,

Philip B McPherson