

8<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Attention: **The Secretary**  
 Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee  
 House of Representatives  
 P.O Box 6021  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra ACT 2600  
 aff.reps@aph.gov.au

<b>Submission No:</b>	43
<b>Date Received:</b>	5/6/07
<b>Secretary:</b>	<i>[Signature]</i>

### **Submission: the future development of the Australian Honeybee Industry.**

#### **Current and future honey bee industry prospects:**

The Bee industry faces many hurdles in its day to day and future operations/planning.

These issues include loss of access to crown land, the loss of floral resources due to land development and/or urban encroachment, the effects and/or threat of pests and diseases (endemic and exotic), maintaining income at a sufficient level to meet rising cost and a good standard of living, and the possible effects of climate change.

Future prospects for the Bee industry include the live export of honey bee packages and Queen Bees. With the decline of managed honey bees world-wide due to various pests and diseases, the Australian Bee industry is in a position to provide honey bee packages and Queen Bees internationally.

In the future the industry may change its focus from honey production to pollination.

The increased international demand for seed (for crops) may require support from the Australian crop seed producers who in turn require the assistance of honey bee pollination in this process; therefore the importance of pollination in Australia and internationally cannot be undervalued. As farmers search for an improved crop yield the Honey bee industry is being called upon more often to provide paid pollination services. This increase in paid pollination may have the effect of honey producers focusing more on pollination.

#### **Bee Industry role in agriculture and forestry:**

The role of honey bees in pollination of agricultural crops -

The effects of honey bee may be necessary to produce a crop or may improve the quality or quantity of the crop.

With the increased use of chemicals in farming to control pests and diseases there is a higher risk of beekeepers losing hives. Beekeepers involved in pollination work that have their hives killed or adversely effected by sprays can only get compensation for the beehives but nothing for loss of income. Gaining access to this compensation can be quite difficult. There are many obstacles to overcome; even if beekeepers have a pollination agreement that outlines terms and conditions of compensation it is still difficult to obtain an actual payout. The compensation is often paid a considerable time after the hives were lost or damaged and this has a considerable economic effect on the beekeeper. Most of this contracted pollination takes place in spring at or before the start of the honey season the effect of losing beehives in effect prevents the beekeeper maintaining a living.

In recent times there has been a strong movement towards the conservation of lands in tenures that prevent the land being used for any purpose other than conservation. This land may have been used for a timber resource, for grazing or one of many other smaller industries that rely on native forest. The multiple uses of forests have benefited the beekeeping industry by providing access to floral resources. This use of land has the benefits of providing access and management tools and funding to maintain and improve the public estate. The reduction in funding from the loss of timber royalties, grazing lease fees etc will result in poorly managed public lands. The costs of maintaining access tracks and fire breaks will have to be met from the public purse. Failure to maintain these management tools will result in fire and environmental damage. The clear felling or sacrifice of some areas to fill timber quotas is not supported by beekeepers.

The bee industry has strong interests in sustainable resources and requires access to these areas. These areas provide key breeding conditions and nectar resources required to produce honey. The breeding conditions provided in these areas are vital for pollination hives before and after pollination activities.

### **Bio-security issues:**

The introduction of an exotic bee, bee disease, or pest affecting bees, would have a disastrous effect on the honey bee industry. The effects of one of these will reduce the ability of the industry to meet the pollination demands and maintain sustainable state. With the subsequent reduction feral bee population, farmers who had come to rely on these bees to pollinate their crops or pasture would have to source bees to carry out the population.

The beekeepers will have a hard time maintaining beehive/bee populations. Many of the exotic pests or diseases require the use of chemicals, something the industry does not commonly do. This could bring residues in honey and the built up chemicals could affect the hive health. A cause for concern is the lack of a co-ordinate surveillance programme across Australia.

As beekeepers are migratory and travel on a regular basis, visiting numerous crops and floral resources throughout the year their bees may come in contact with a pest or disease that does not affect bees. For example, if a quarantine area was established for foot-in-mouth the bees in the area would not be allowed to move. This could also be the case for something like fire-blight and the economic effects on the beekeeper will be high as there is no compensation for loss of income. Currently there is only compensation for the destruction of effected livestock.

Bio-security is a very serious issue and I feel that a review of education to beekeepers about diseases and reporting processes is needed. The reporting system also needs a review and a response test. There also needs to be some education about the consequences or penalties for movement of effected hives or hives in a quarantine area.

At this time, there are personnel in key bee-specific bio-security positions, state and federal, that are literally irreplaceable. I feel we need more emphasis placed on recruitment and education of other personnel for the eventual replacement within these positions. This will ensure all information and processes are continued and understood.

### **Trade Issues:**

It could be said that Australian honey is probably the highest quality honey available in the world. The Australian industry has a very low use of chemicals and therefore low or no chemical residues. The industry also has high levels of quality control and as such has little difficulty in exporting honey. Unfortunately honey imported into this country does not meet the quality or standard of Australian honey. This sub-standard honey has the effect of reducing domestic sales by damaging honey industry reputation.

The export control act ensures that exported honeys are at a high quality level while honey of a lower quality is still imported. The procedures surrounding the importation of bee products really need a review as these poor products are sub-standard and reflect poorly on the industry as a whole.

### **The impact of land management and bushfires:**

Poor management of crown land results in a reduction of biodiversity through the spread of invasive weeds or pests and poor fire management.

The use of fire in the Australian environment is vital in maintaining biodiversity by reducing the effects of weeds and promoting the growth of native flora. With tighter restrictions on public money, there is an across-the-board reduction on money spent on fire breaks. This often leads to delays and ineffective attempts to control bushfires. In many areas fuel reduction burning has ceased, this has been detrimental to the environment and means that quite often the fuel builds up to a level that allows fires to reach an intensity where they crown and destroy ecosystems.

There are many public employees who are very capable managers of crown lands; these individuals have experience in maintaining the bio-diversity of these crown lands. Their expertise in the use and management of fire is all too often overruled by an uneducated external influence i.e. a green group, a politician or person/organisation of similar influence to the detriment of the environment.

Beekeepers rely on the diversity of the land to provide us with opportunities to produce honey. Poorly managed, damaged or destroyed forested areas are of little use to beekeepers and the public as a whole. Therefore we support a sensible fire management and rejuvenation program.

In Queensland, where I live and operate most of my business, through the regional forest agreements the Qld government is looking at significantly reducing the access of beekeepers to crown lands. This will have a major effect on the industry and associated industries. The reasoning for the removal of beekeepers is not scientifically based and I feel the industry as a whole has a beneficial effect on the community.

### **The research and development needs of the industry:**

There are many things that require research or development in the honeybee industry; these include research on bee genetics, bee diseases, pollination and bee nutrition. The research into bee genetics is needed to provide bees that are better producers, more resistant to disease and result in a higher return for beekeepers.

There needs to be some research into the effects of various pests and diseases on the Australian honeybee industry and ways to reduce their impact. This may include mite-resistant bees and bees with better cleaning genes. The decommissioning of the quarantine facility at Walgrove and the question of if or when will it be replaced is of concern. If there is no replacement of this facility the industry will have no safe means of importing genetic stock. This will hamper the industries ability to adapt and overcome and future hurdles. A replacement facility would also have to be affordable for it to be utilised by the industry.

Research into bee nutrition is an important step forward. As bees are being worked harder, travelling longer distances and producing honey from crops with low quality pollen, bee nutrition becomes an important part of maintaining the hive. Some crops pollinated by bees may also provide a sub-standard nutritional diet for bees and a supplement is needed.

More research needs to be carried out into the effects of pollination on many agricultural crops. While the effects may be understood the full economic benefits are not. Resulting education or documentation from this research would be of great use for farmers and beekeepers when negotiating pollination contracts.

Research also needs to be carried out on the short and long term effects of agricultural chemicals on beehives, from overspray and systemic poisoning.

### **Personal conclusion:**

My industry as a whole is an aging industry, most people in the industry are over 50 and I feel that our industry needs to do more recruiting and training of younger people to ensure its future success. It is an industry where hard work, knowledge and a bit of good luck, a good living can be earned. The industry is at a precipice of change where I see its future in agriculture, as a whole, coming to the fore.

The development of the pollination industry has the ability to provide the beekeeper with a more stable income. The introductions of diseases or pests that are exotic to this country are of grave concern, although the industry will continue as long as it has access to adequate resources. The access to resources that have traditionally been used by beekeepers must be maintained to ensure this industry's continuation. As a whole education regarding the importance of honeybees in the food chain (natural and agricultural) is vital.

**Neville Bradford**  
Queensland Beekeeper