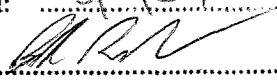


Rodney & Jennifer Whitehead  
Walkabout Apiaries

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Secretary:	

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Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra Act 2600  
Australia

Dear Sir/Madame;

We wish to contribute to the Inquiry into the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry, referring in particular to its present and future prospects, its limitations and opportunities as they relate to our business.

We have seen a declining industry over the last 30 years with an aging and declining beekeeper population.

Young people as a whole are not interested in following their parents into the industry nor are many "outsiders" attracted to a full time apiary career although many enjoy it as a hobby.

This is quite evident in our own family with our sons making it very clear that they do not want to experience the lack of security, poor returns and high anxiety levels witnessed in the family. They have all sought a future in other fields.

Strangely enough, we still see exciting prospects that are attainable with Government support, community recognition and better returns in a fair market place.

We are a small family business, based in NE Vic. with 800 – 1000 bee hives to manage.

We produce, process, pack and sell our own product directly to the customer through farm-gate sales and at Farmers' Markets, or we sell to small stores in the area and Melbourne.

In short, we “value-add,” supposedly for better returns.

Although it would be so much easier to sell to a packer and just concentrate on honey production, the reality is that honey prices are so low and variable that we need to not only take charge of our cash flow by marketing our own product, but also need to seek other opportunities to make a living by selling pollination services to horticulturist & to sell the bees themselves to overseas customers.

We are getting older, but not old enough to retire and we are weary.

We would dearly love to hand over our business to our sons, but cannot encourage their interest given the industries' history.

#### Current & Future Prospects

These are limited by: -

- Diminishing returns for honey production
- Competition for diminishing resources ( forests ).
- Inability to support a stable work-force due to poor returns & high costs
- Inability to find willing and suitably trained staff anyway.
- Increased costs of inputs, eg fuel & power
- Risks to future viability due to threats to the industry, eg Varroa mites
- Chemical risks to honey bees pollinating agricultural crops.
- Lack of funds available for expansion & development.
- No direct flights for Victorian packaged bees destined for San Francisco, USA.

Opportunities: -

- Increasing demands for pollination services and acceptance by the horticultural industry.
- Increasing demand for packaged honeybees and queen bees for overseas markets, notably the USA.
- Increasing demand for organic honey products.
- A need for young people to replace retiring beekeepers.

If our industry is to be strong and viable, it needs: -

- Secure access to resources to build healthy, effective bees.
- Sufficient income to support secure employment.
- Well-trained beekeepers & staff.
- Confidence in biosecurity systems.
- Adequate numbers of well trained and resourced extension officers and inspectors.
- A fair market place.
- A workable structure for an Australian organic honey industry based on sound beekeeping practises, backed up by sound scientific research, and recognizing and acknowledging industry knowledge and skills.
- A review of State and Federal Taxes on the high cost of inputs especially on fuel, depreciation rates of major capital expenses, eg. buildings and equipment.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

Yours faithfully,

R C Whitehead & J A Whitehead