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SUBMISSION

This submission is in response to the House of Representatives inquiry into the future development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry from the Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc.

This will include discussion of the key points and responses to:-

- ❖ Current and future prospects
- ❖ Role in agriculture
- ❖ Biosecurity issues
- ❖ Trade issues
- ❖ Impact of land management and bush Fires
- ❖ Research , development and education needs of the industry
- ❖ Existing industry and Government work that has been undertaken for the honey bee industry.

CURRENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Our Profile: Queensland

Currently there are 3094 registered Apiarists on the QDPI&F data base. In total 135 544 bee colonies are owned and managed by registered beekeepers. 109 Apiarists manage 81 265 beehives and the balance own between 1 and 250 hives.

The majority of the honey bee industry is supported by the sale of raw honey. Other smaller income streams are sourced from the sale of queen bees, bees wax, package bees, medical honey and pollination services.

The quality of Australian honey is ranked with the best in the world. This is attributed to the pristine environment from which it is produced as well as management practices adhered to by most industry players.

The farm gate price of this product does not reflect its quality and is unable to support this industry in its present form, (see Figure 1, below). Another disturbing trend is the reduction in the farm gate price of honey yet a sizable increase to the retail price.

It is disgraceful to think the consumer pays so much and producer gets so little, (see Figure 2, below). Unfortunately the honey industry is not unique in regards to this matter; many other primary producers are affected in the same manner eg: dairy, fruit & vegetable growers etc.

Figure 1

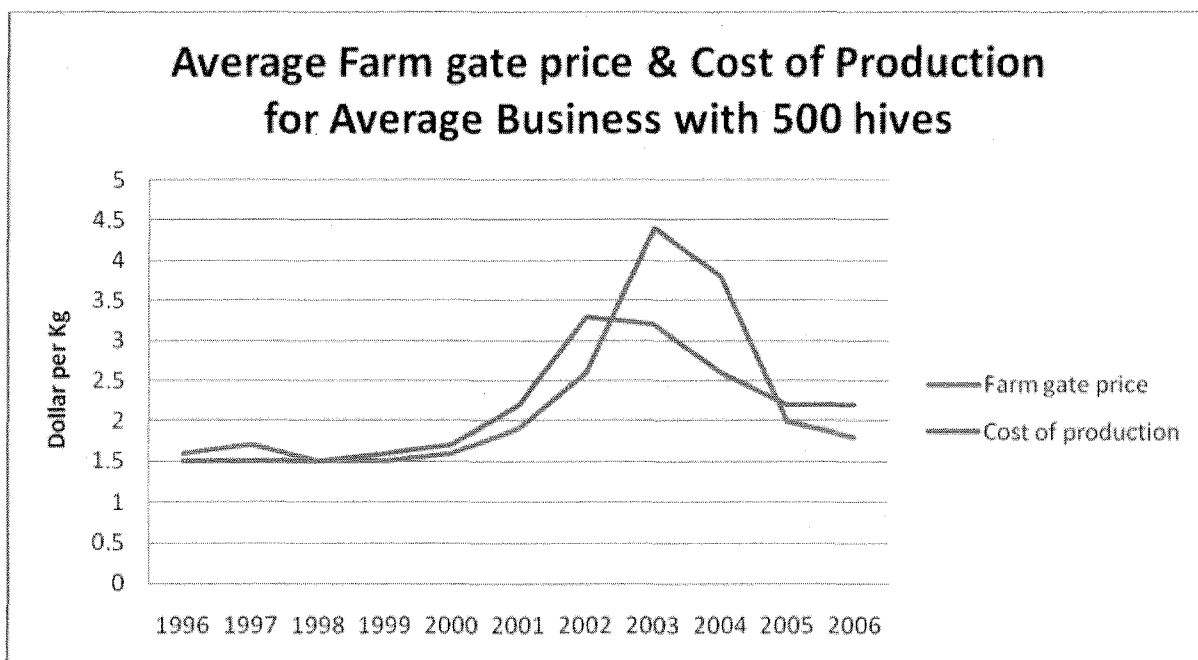
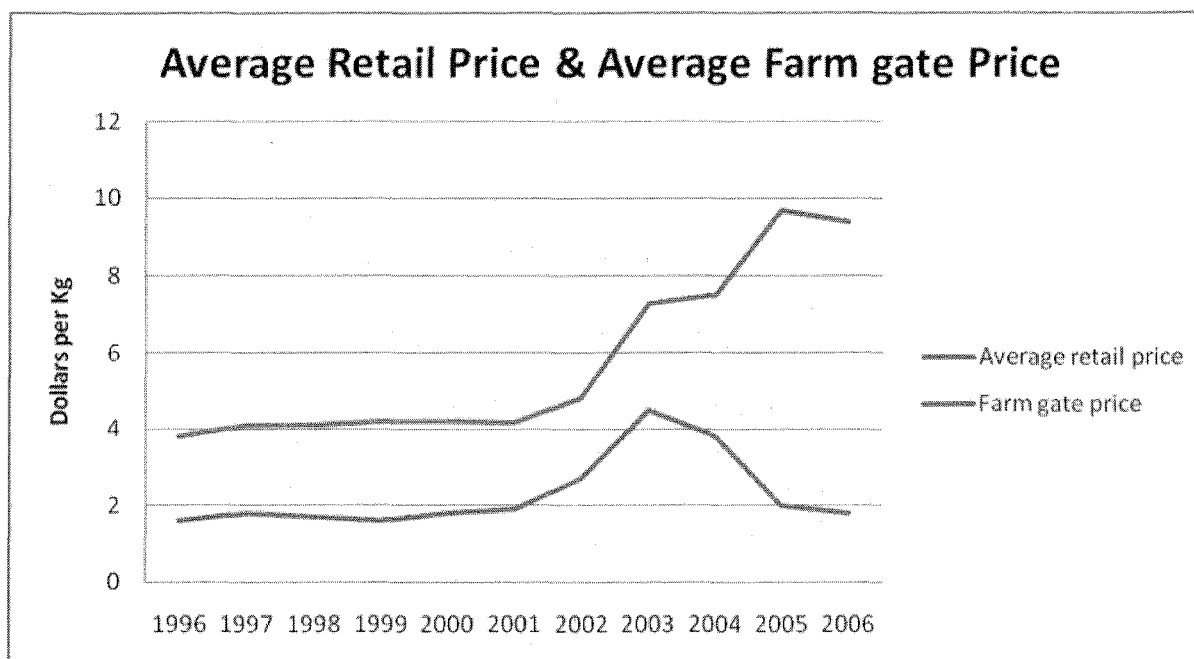


Figure 2



Diversification is clearly the way forward for the honey bee industry. Multiple income streams will facilitate the growth to a more financially robust industry. Commercial pollination has the potential to become the foundation of the honey bee industry into the future.

Package bees and queen bee exports also have the ability to grow at a substantial rate, providing the Australian environment remains free of exotic pests and diseases and the improvement in honey bee genetics continues.

In our world today, antibiotic resistance organisms seem to be on the rise. Australian honey with therapeutic and medicinal properties has proved to be an extremely successful weapon against these seemingly unstoppable bugs. The benefits this honey affords to the greater community warrants Government funded research to better assess the potential of this wonder product.

ROLE IN AGRICULTURE

The role played by the Honey Bee Industry in agriculture is two fold. First is the product produced from within the industry. This being honey, beeswax, Queen Bees, package bees and other hive products i.e.: royal jelly, propolis and pollen. These products combined have a gross value of production of approximately \$125 m. This

figure is highly variable due to impacts such as drought, bushfires and fluctuation in farm gate honey price. Secondly, and growing in importance is the dependence of some crops on the honeybee industry for pollination. Approximately 60% of Australian agriculture and horticulture depend on honeybee pollination. Some are totally reliant on insect pollination to produce a crop while others to varying degrees. At present the lion's share of these pollination services are carried out by feral bees and managed colonies that happen to be in the area for other purposes.

The pollination service provided by feral bees is under threat. History has showed us that when *Varroa destructor* (an exotic bee mite) spread throughout the USA and more recently New Zealand; it decimated feral populations and commercial hives. The crop losses in the USA reached a staggering total of 15 billion dollars per annum, while estimates in Australia have been placed between 1.7 and 2 billion dollars per annum.

Agricultural chemicals also impact heavily on honey bees. Some chemicals have a high residual effect and over time render a bee hive toxic. This is an increasing problem with the use of specialized seed treatments and other systemic chemicals. On a more positive note there are honeybee friendly products used by more discerning farmers who are aware of the increased yields provided by sufficient pollination.

BIOSECURITY ISSUES

The number one threat to the honeybee industry would be an incursion of exotic honeybee pests and diseases. This makes biosecurity issues of the utmost importance.

A National Sentinel Hive Program was put in place in 2000. This consists of 'Sticky Mat' surveillance hives placed at sea ports around Australia to facilitate the early detection of exotic pests and diseases. The Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc. assessed the risks involved with the possibility of an incursion because of our close proximity to PNG and the Torres Strait Islands. Earthmoving equipment and other cargo frequently move between these South East Asian centers and the ports in North Queensland and Brisbane. It was thought prudent to double the number of surveillance hives in Queensland to enhance the chances of an early detection of these unwanted pests. The surveillance effort in Queensland now consists of 40 Government sticky mat mite surveillance hives and 40 Industry sticky mat mite surveillance hives with more mite surveillance hives planned.

As trade and travel increases in our global community it is imperative that biosecurity be effective and be continually upgraded to exclude known pests and diseases. An

incursion of exotic honeybee pests and diseases would impact heavily on the economic viability of the honeybee industry. It would also have a limiting effect on the number of bee colonies available to agriculture for pollination services. This scenario would no doubt substantially increase the cost of fruit and vegetables and other farm produce to the broader community. Australia is now one of the last remaining countries to be free of *Varroa*, *Tracheal* and *Tropilaelaps* mites. It would be in the best interests of all Australians if the status quo remained.

The establishment and monitoring of statistically significant numbers of sticky mat surveillance hives around the ports throughout Australia should be a matter of priority for AQIS, State Primary Industry Departments, Agricultural and Horticultural Associations and State Beekeeping Associations.

The importation of new genetic breeding stock is a matter of grave concern for the honeybee industry. The quarantine facility at Eastern Creek NSW has been sold and will cease to provide an importation service for honeybee genetic breeding stock after 2010. This will reduce Australia's ability to produce good quality queen bees for export and also impact on our honey industry as poor genetic stock create numerous problems, such as low honey production and poor disease resistance. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) needs to address this problem without delay.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND BUSH FIRES

The loss of native resources or loss or access to this resource is the second biggest threat to the honeybee industry. Over a number of years there has been a movement towards growing the conserved estate across Australia. This has been achieved by land tenure changes from State Forest to National Parks. In Queensland the Nature Conservation Act did not allow managed honeybees on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estate, which included the newly gazetted National Parks which were formerly State Forests. However in November 2005 a Queensland Government legislative change allowed beekeeping on the EPA estate where there was a prior history of beekeeping but **with an exit date of 2024!!!** The decision to exclude honeybees from the new National Parks was purely a political decision, not one based on science or common sense. The honeybee industry in Australia has been established on the use of public lands of many varying tenures, to remove honeybees from newly formed National Parks robs the industry of the very resource it needs to survive. Any reduction of this vital resource will have a catastrophic impact on not only the honeybee industry but also on agriculture that depend on pollination services. These forested areas are also used to rebuild hives after they have been on pollination contracts. It is a haven away from agricultural chemicals and allows the hive to recuperate.

With a world very concerned about the quality of the food it requires these forest produce a premium organic honey.

Research into the impact of managed migratory beekeeping is urgently required so governments can make decisions based on sound scientific knowledge.

Public land managers are supposed to be just that - managers. The trend with conserved estate today appears to be 'lock it up and it will look after itself'. This philosophy can not be allowed to continue as bush fires have devastated large tracks of honeybee resources. Due to the absence of any activities in the National Parks (cattle grazing), fuel loads increase rapidly, add to this dry hot summers and we have an environmental disaster. This has been seen over past years in the Piliga Scrub in New South Wales and to a larger extent in Victoria.

The honeybee industry is environmentally responsible and is well on the way to having a national code of conduct for its members. This document will be a great handbook for industry and an asset to public land managers as well. Our industry is committed to the long term conservation and ongoing management of conserved lands within Australia.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

Research is an integral part of any industry, with continual upgrading of all skills, bee husbandry, business management, environment management, pest and disease control and education, just to name a few. Research funding for industry is achieved through a levy on production. This funding is insufficient to maintain a viable honeybee industry. The honeybee linkages workshop in Canberra April 2007 pointed out the fact that the honeybee industry itself is small, but the horticultural and agricultural industries that are supported by this industry are of considerable size and make up the fastest growing sector in primary production to date. Also the benefits to the broader community are substantial. With this in mind it would be prudent for all parties concerned to pool research funds to achieve the maximum value for money. However history has proved good research outcomes have made it possible to position industries at the 'front of the pack' thus rewarding the participants with improved financial returns.

Education is often over looked by most industries and it is very clear that programs for all industry players are of utmost importance.

The honeybee industry is not alone in its inability to attract young people into its ranks. This problem is only the 'tip of the iceberg'.

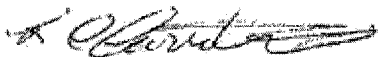
To sustain the honeybee industry, young people also need to fill roles such as scientists, researchers and DPI Apiary staff.

In conclusion Governments, State and Federal, Agricultural and Horticultural industries, councils and the general public need to be made aware of the integral role honeybees play in the Australian economy. The value of the industry needs to be realized for its combined worth, that is honey, pollination services, medicinal honey and many other benefits that the honeybees provide for all.

EXISTING INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT WORK FOR INDUSTRY

Queen Bee Improvement Program	Industry	/	Federal
Partnership program			Federal
Code of Practice (EMS)	Industry	/	Federal
Linkages Workshop			Federal
Quality Assurance Programs (B-Qual and B-Safe)	Industry		
DPI Queen Rearing			State
Disease and Pest Control	Industry		State Federal
Extension dissemination of information			State
Disease Response (Aus Vet Plan)	Industry	/	Federal
Research (HBRDC / RIRDC)	Industry	/	Federal
National Sentinel Hive Program	Industry		State Federal
National Residue Survey (NRS)	Industry	/	Federal
Export / Import Control (AQIS)			Federal

On behalf of Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc.



Rex Carruthers

State Vice-President