



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Inquiry into the future development of the
Australian Honey Bee Industry

MEDIA ALERT

Issued: 7 June 2007

Chair: Alby Schultz MP
Deputy Chair: Dick Adams MP

Bees: An industry in crisis?

The honey bee industry is a small but vital part of agriculture in Australia. While the honey bee industry directly contributes only some \$60 million dollars to the Australian economy annually, the pollination services provided by honey bees are worth billions of dollars per annum to the agriculture and horticulture sectors.

Despite its importance, the industry remains vulnerable to disease threats, loss of access to resources, and trade competition from low-wage countries. On the other hand, there is great potential for the expansion of the industry through bee exports, paid pollination services and the development of medicinal honey products.

The House of Representatives agriculture committee has commenced its inquiry into the future development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry. The first public hearing for the inquiry will be held on **13 June 2007**, in Committee Room **1R3**, Parliament House, Canberra.

The committee will hear from the representatives of the federal **Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry** (DAFF) on the current and future prospects of the honey bee industry. DAFF plays a vital role in the provision of quarantine services and export certification, biosecurity risk management, market access assistance, levy collection services and industry development grants.

The committee is anxious to hear from the department about the future of quarantine and other biosecurity services in the face of the imminent danger represented by an incursion of **Varroa destructor**, a highly destructive bee parasite.

Committee chair, Alby Schultz noted that "Australian agriculture is highly dependent on feral honey bees for the pollination of crops and pasture. If the Varroa mite enters Australia, the managed honey bee population will be decimated, while feral honey bees will be virtually wiped out. This has major implications for governments and producers across Australia."

Varroa has spread throughout the world, and no country has succeeded in eradicating an incursion once it occurs. Australia is the only country in the world still Varroa-free.

Mr Schultz said: "Varroa will come to Australia, and how well prepared we are to meet it will determine the level of damage it causes. It is vital to the future of Australian agriculture that we prepare to meet the threat of Varroa before it arrives on our shores."

PUBLIC HEARING—Honey Bee Inquiry—Canberra, Wednesday 13 June 2007

WHERE: Committee Room 1R3, Parliament House, Canberra
WHEN: Wednesday 13 June 2007, 5pm–6.30pm
WEBCAST: <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

Public and media most welcome

For media comment: please contact the committee chair, Alby Schultz MP, on (02) 6277 4386 or email Alby.Schultz.MP@aph.gov.au.

For background information, including the terms of reference, contact the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4500 or at Aff.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind/