


**The Future Development of the Australian Honeybee Industry.**

An inquiry by The House of Representatives Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee.

To: The Secretary  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600.

<b>Submission No:</b> .....	46
<b>Date Received:</b> .....	12-6-07
<b>Secretary:</b> .....	

Submission by: Dr Maxwell N. Hunter.

Date: June, 2007.

The purpose in presenting this submission to the inquiry into 'The Future Development of the Australian Honeybee Industry' is that the side-line, small or amateur beekeeper in Australia seems to be almost forgotten except for the one-line reference in the RIRDC submission (May 2007) on page 26, paragraph 5.

The Victorian Apiarists' Association Incorporated consists predominantly of side-line beekeepers who mainly reside in the suburbs of Melbourne and major provincial cities. Other general state and territory beekeeping associations have similar proportional memberships. Their bees are usually not subject to the vagaries of forest flora since in these areas there seems to be almost always some flowering plants, vegetables and trees from which bees can obtain nourishment and thus maintain throughout the year. The advantage of association membership to side-line beekeepers is that news of disease controls and new exotic incursions should be broadcast via newsletters and magazine articles; otherwise side-line beekeepers have little to no interaction with mainstream apiarists.

Side-line beekeepers are subject to the endemic diseases (European and American Foulbrood, etc.) and incursions of exotic pests (wax moth and small hive beetle, and inevitably, varroa and other mites) that invade the beehives of all beekeepers. In the main, side-line beekeepers are vary fastidious with their hive management techniques, and are able to detect and track small differences within the hive and thus become aware of these outbreaks.

The side-line beekeeper does to some degree participate in pollination of agricultural crops and orchards – particularly canola, clover, stone fruits and apples. Mainly the hives of side-line beekeepers incidentally pollinate the home garden vegetables and fruit trees from which there is hardly any commercial return to the beekeeper except for a honey and beeswax surplus that may be gathered in most years.

Some side-line beekeepers use native flora forests for honey production and continued access to these forests is essential for these enterprises to remain viable. There seems to be the push from some lobby-groups and governments to lock-up forests for a variety of reasons and in particular to keep beekeeping out. Valuable honey bearing flora could be accessed by all of the beekeeping fraternity if it were deemed that apiculture caused little to no impact on the ecology. The diminishing forest access will have a devastating affect on all types of beekeeping, both commercial and side-line.

The catastrophic impact of an incursion of varroa mite to the side-line beekeeper needs to be highlighted, despite its slow spread through such managed beehives. Side-line beekeepers could lose their entire bee stock and therefore find it very difficult to recover because new stock would need to be purchased with no rebate from government. There is, however, a more devastating consequence to a varroa mite incursion. Feral beehives would die out and this could lead to a serious outbreak of hive robbing causing the uncontrolled spread of mite

and disease to managed beehives, and also the incidental pollination by such feral hives would not be enjoyed by orchardists or field-crop farmers. Thus these growers would need to buy in honeybee hives for their crop pollination. Home gardeners mostly enjoy the incidental pollination (at no cost) of their fruit trees and vegetables by honeybees from neighbouring back-yards where side-line apiarists mostly keep their hives. Lack of honeybees from whatever cause will most likely result in this vegetation generating inferior or even no produce.

Varroa mite has been found in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, and in all other non-artic continents. It seems only a matter of time before it is found in Australia despite all good intentioned quarantine services, and only recently it was thought to have entered the mainland of Australia (Queensland) having been carried in with a colony of Asian honeybees (*Apis cerana*) – the natural host of the varroa mite - in the mast of a ship.

The impact of small hive beetle has not been fully realized at the time of writing as the incursion is not Australia wide nor even eastern state wide, despite recent observations in eastern New South Wales and northern Victoria. It has been written that small hive beetle outbreaks do not pose as much a threat to honeybees as other pests, but nevertheless such an outbreak would be a big factor in the viability of side-line apiaries but the combination of varroa mite and small hive beetle in any hive would be catastrophic as has been seen in USA.

Colony Collapse Disorder or Syndrome has been observed in the USA (now in 27 of its states) and Europe, but fortunately not in Australia. The causative agent does not seem to be known at this stage but there are many speculations, some of which are linked with the varroa mite. Hives exhibiting this syndrome would severely curtail the activities of the side-line beekeeper, as a new start would inevitably cause the apiarist to calculate the financial costs before resuming their activity.

Land management for side-line beekeepers has undergone systemic change in Victoria as beekeeping is now under the Apiary Code of Practice, both in urban and rural areas. The Apiary Code of Practice was designed to minimize the impact of honeybee keeping with the general public; it formulates guidelines for the cohabitation of honeybees and humans. Transfer of land use powers from state to federal jurisdiction should take into account this Code of Practice.

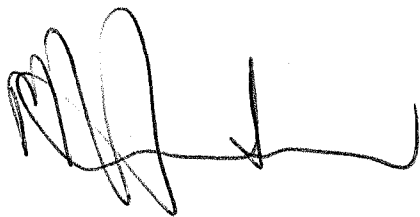
This correspondent endorses the recommendations set out in the RIRDC submission with the presumption that side-line apiarists be included in the ‘beekeeping industry’ and not just the commercial arm; their separation from the whole beekeeping fraternity can only divide or fragment and possibly cause a disenfranchised group not seen by government or other regulatory authorities.

#### Side-line beekeepers

- should fully endorse the production of quality non-contaminated honey and other hive products,
- should participate in all education programs which assist apiarists in the recognition, control and eradication of exotic pests – especially small hive beetle and various mites,
- should participate in a national educational program for the control of American Foulbrood,
- should actively encourage government to implement research programs for the control and eradication of Colony Collapse Disorder, and
- should seek to assist the whole beekeeping fraternity to deliver an Australia wide ‘perfect’ food stuff.

There seems to be a lack of government sponsorship in providing research funding and facilities for the study and eradication of diseases and pests that occur in Australian honeybee hives, together with a distinct lack of education for the beekeeping community. State governments have consistently decreased the apiary inspectorates and their importance in the agricultural sector and seem to rely on studies undertaken overseas and apply them to the Australian scene. The side-line beekeeper does not seem to be in the closed loop of full-time apiarists when national workshops and studies are undertaken, and the acquired knowledge gained from such studies is too filtered when it reaches this level.

I acknowledge the brevity of this submission but should the Committee deem that it could be clarified and amplified, I am at its disposal for such matters.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.