

Government Response

Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References  
Committee

Inquiry Report: Science underpinning the inability  
to eradicate the Asian honey bee

### Interim Report Recommendations

- **The committee recommends that the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests reconsider the question of whether the Asian honey bee is eradicable from Australia; and, following that reconsideration, make a fresh recommendation to the National Management Group on the Asian honey bee incursion management response; the Consultative Committee should specifically consider this question in light of evidence relating to the potential for the insect's spread and resulting environmental, economic and social costs; the Consultative Committee should specifically apply the precautionary principle to areas of scientific uncertainty in its reconsideration of these issues.**
- **The committee recommends that, on receipt of a fresh recommendation from the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests, the National Management Group reconsider the question of whether it is technically feasible to eradicate the Asian honey bee from Australia; the National Management Group should specifically apply the precautionary principle to areas of scientific uncertainty in its reconsideration of this issue.**
- **The committee recommends that, in the event that the full Asian honey bee eradication program is reinstated, a scientific program of data collection concerning the detection, spread and eradicability of the Asian honey bee from Australia be initiated in order to properly inform future decision making regarding this emergency plant pest.**

**Response:** The Government accepts all recommendations and notes that the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests did reconvene but found that it again could not reach consensus about whether the Asian honey bee could be eradicated. The National Management Group reconvened on 12 May 2011 to consider the impact of the Consultative Committee deliberations on the original decision on eradicability. Although consensus was not reached, the Group determined that it is not technically feasible to achieve eradication.

However, this does not mean that important control activities against the bee have ceased. The Government has provided a further \$2 million to support a national pilot program to facilitate the transition of action from eradication to the ongoing management of Asian honey bees.

This program is being developed in consultation with Biosecurity Queensland and the honey bee industry and is close to being finalised.

### Final Report Recommendation

**The committee recommends that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) and relevant scientific organisations, such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), be consulted as soon as an incursion is reported to provide advice on the biodiversity consequences of the establishment and spread of the pest.**

**The committee further recommends that a written response from SEWPaC and the relevant scientific organisations is made to the relevant agencies as soon as possible setting out the biodiversity consequences.**

*Response:* The Government accepts the first part of this recommendation and notes that the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) already participates in discussions of the National Management Group (NMG)—the peak decision making body for national responses to pest and disease incursions. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, however, is the nominated Australian Government delegate.

The Government notes that as part of the decision making process, National Management Group members already consider biodiversity consequences of the establishment and spread of a pest or disease.

Relevant advice is sought from scientific experts when necessary including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), through the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests or the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases or through Scientific Advisory Panels appointed by these committees. These committees are the key coordinating bodies which provide technical advice to the National Management Group.

The Government does not accept the second part of this recommendation. SEWPaC and relevant scientific agencies already have the ability to provide written advice either through the National Management Group or Consultative Committees. Furthermore, the National Management Group may need to take prompt action to deal with an incursion and waiting for written advice from SEWPaC and scientific agencies may hinder action being taken in a timely manner.