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Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**2014 Senate Enquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia**

Dear Committee Secretary,

I make the following submission:

**B. Current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally, and its future sustainability.**

1. The increasing number of pesticides and insecticides especially neonicotinoids widely used in urban, suburban and rural agricultural environments have wide ranging lethal and sub-lethal implications for bees, and humans further up the food chain. As Australia does not appear to have the budget nor the will nor the expertise to assess the situation, consideration should be given to mapping Australia's regulations to that of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA [www.efsa.europa.eu](http://www.efsa.europa.eu)) so as to match Australian our domestic regulations to that of our most stringent export market partner. As recent research indicates, the potential risk to human health is serious. There has recently been much concern generated from an EFSA report indicating the potential for developmental neurotoxicity in mammals caused by chemicals of the category neonicotinoids which are widely in use in Australia. See attachment scientific opinion acetamiprid and imidacloprid 3471.PDF.

In the same vein, I have personally had difficulties registering adverse reactions (dramatic lowering of the fecundity of queen bees) and non-effectiveness of the chemical Fipronol approved for field trials to combat small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*) in beehives. It is not enough to just have a website for reporting. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) website needs to work as in

upload documents and also to include chemicals such as Fiprinol in Apithor Traps which fall under the category of “field trials”.

2. Research projects focusing on how to deal with Small Hive Beetle (SHB) under Australian conditions. SHB not only wipes out entire hives and contaminates honey, wax and pollen. A multifaceted approach to research projects and adequate funding is necessary to address a pest for which we do not have any effective apiary management protocols, and which is now unlikely to be eradicated. Research funding into the management of SHB needs to be a key research priority and ongoing.

**C. Adequacy of current biosecurity arrangements for imported and exported honey apiary products, package bees and queen bees.**

1. EASTERN CREEK QUARANTINE STATION will close in 2015. The Federal Government has allocated \$380million over seven years for the construction of the new facility in Victoria. The beekeeping industry has expressed concerns about locating the facility in Victoria. Eastern Creek is a more centralized location that is easier to access for the majority of queen breeders most of which operate out of NSW and Queensland. Victoria’s highly variable climate, extreme temperatures and longer winter reduce the window of potential optimal breeding conditions. Despite this we have been informed by the Federal Government although they will support alternate quarantine facilities for the import of bees, they will not provide any other funding other than through the Victorian facility.

I am in favour of a facility located in a more temperate and centralized location and recommend the committee adopt the previous suggestion by ABHIC and fully fund a honey bee quarantine facility at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, Camden or similar location.

2. There is currently no protocol for the importation of Honeybee semen despite the completion of risk assessment and recent resumption of Queen Bee importation. I ask the senate enquiry to rectify this oversight.

Overseas experience with varroa indicates a rapid decline in feral population and large losses in the first two years as beekeepers adjust management techniques to cope.

Honeybee semen will survive at room temperature for about 10–14 days and can be used to bring in Varroa resistant genetic material to pre-empt an incursion of Varroa. Australian beekeepers are in a unique position to take advantage of years of overseas research conducted into Varroa resistant breeding stock . Honeybee semen has

advantages of ease of transport, long term viability without much care and is not a vector for the transfer of parasites and mites therefore reducing risk in this area.

The process asking for a protocol for the importation of honeybee semen dates back to 2002

On 6 June 2002, Biosecurity Australia issued memo 2002/29 saying they were preparing an import risk assessment (IRA) for honey bee semen. The commencement advice said that this IRA was "a high priority". In August 2002 a Technical Issues Paper, called "A draft generic import risk analysis (IRA) for honey bee semen", was produced. On 30 March 2006 a document entitled BIOSECURITY AUSTRALIA POLICY MEMORANDUM 2006/08 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPORT RISK ANALYSIS OF HONEYBEE SEMEN was produced. In 2008 the government response to the "**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources Inquiry Report: *More Than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries***" recommended that a drone bee semen IRA be progressed before the end of 2008 (Recommendation 12). The comprehensive process required would not permit the completion of an IRA for drone semen by this time. The government notes, however, that honey bee semen from New Zealand is currently Priority A on the IMAAG import proposal priority list Accordingly, further consideration of this matter will take into account work already undertaken by Biosecurity Australia to date on the generic honey bee semen IRA but may focus on imports of bee semen from New Zealand due to their favourable bee health status.

There has been no further progress on this issue since that date.

It would be advantageous if this process could be completed prior to the closure of the Eastern Creek Quarantine facility in 2015.

3. If in the event of a biosecurity scare or warning, I feel it would be more effective to require the mandatory labelling of hives to include not only the brand registration but also the owners' mobile phone numbers. This would ensure that all beekeepers were linked in to receive urgent notifications per SMS. Why not make it easy and cheap for beekeepers to do the right thing.

**D. Australia's food labelling requirements, and how these affect the beekeeping industry.**

1. Truth in labelling. Honey labelled "Product of Australia" should contain 100 per cent Australian honey. Currently, it is my understanding that honey labeled product of Australia only needs to contain 51 per cent Australian honey. Often there is a "throw – away– line" used that it may contain local and imported ingredients. If foreign honey is

included the country of origin and percentage for each honey should appear on the label.

2. Meeting basic labelling requirements. Australia has very simple and straight forward labeling laws for honey sold on the domestic market. The few regulations that exist should be enforced if for no other reason than for the public health and safety of Australian consumers. Currently honey in markets and shops often does not meet these requirements such that it is packaged in used containers, does not bear the contact details of the packer and or the weight, and honey including additives such as cinnamon and ginger is often not prepared in a commercially registered kitchen. A food scare on the Australian domestic market could have negative implications for Australian exports.

**E. The recommendations from the House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources 2008 report *More than Honey*; the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries, and the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee 2011 report *Science underpinning the inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee*.**

1. The establishment of a National Centre for honey bee and pollination industry research training and extension would be beneficial in securing food production and bee security in the future. This is in line with the recommendation 24 and 16 of the “More Than Honey” report 2007.

There has been no further progress on this issue since that date.

**F. Any related matters.**

1. Formal training of beekeepers. Commercial beekeepers generally progress from the ranks of amateurs as economies of scale are necessary to maintain apiaries. With the increasing pest management and biosecurity issues, I feel the basic knowledge of beekeepers needs to be formalized through training. Institutions that are accredited to run courses need to run them as formal trainings and not just map them to the national curriculum as is currently the practice by the NSW Department of Primary Industries. Also, courses need to be more readily available and at prices and conditions in line with courses offered by TAFE colleges. All courses should clearly indicate the proficiencies levels covered.

2. Beekeepers are primary producers. Beekeepers who do not maintain their hives on properties they live on need access to fuel subsidies in line with other primary producers. Even hobby beekeepers represent 20–25 per cent of the market participants play an important role in the quantity of honey they produce. In line

with the practice in Germany, all beekeepers in Australia should be exempted vehicle registration fees for trailers used exclusively for beekeeping.

3. Work place health and safety and attracting younger persons and women to the industry. Beekeeping is physically demanding and the weights involved are generally over 3kg. I feel that subsidies for lifting devices would help considerably to in the long term attract younger participants and over time increase the number of hives in recent years have been on the decline. See Queensland statistics which have been supplied by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

In closing I would like to mention that I was unable to access a number of the submissions online and did not receive them by separate email before sending in this submission. I also find the Public Hearing scheduled in Bundaberg, QLD on 20 May 2014 very impractical for many beekeepers.

Yours sincerely  
Serena Dorf