

Chapter 1

Referral of the inquiry

1.1 On 12 December 2013, the Senate moved that the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the committee) for inquiry and report by 26 March 2014:

The future of the beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) the importance of these industries from a food security, environmental and financial point of view;
- (b) current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally, and its future sustainability;
- (c) the adequacy of the current biosecurity arrangements for imported and exported honey, apiary products, package bees and queen bees;
- (d) Australia's food labelling requirements, and how these affect the beekeeping industry;
- (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*; and
- (f) any related matters.¹

1.2 On 12 February 2014, the Senate granted an extension of time for reporting until 19 June 2014.²

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry on its webpage and in *The Australian*. The committee received 79 public submissions which were published on the committee's website and are listed at Appendix 1.

1.4 The committee held public hearings in Murray Bridge, South Australia on 15 April 2014 and in Brisbane, Queensland on 20 May 2014. Appendix 2 lists the names and organisations of those who appeared. Details of the inquiry and associated documents including the Hansard transcripts of evidence may be accessed through the committee webpage.

1 The Senate, *Journals of the Senate*, 12 December 2013, pp 364–365.

2 The Senate, *Journals of the Senate*, 12 February 2013, p. 444.

Definitions

1.5 Several different types of bees are discussed in the report therefore specific terminology is set out below:

- Asian honey bees (AHB), *Apis cerana*, are honey bees native to south-east and mainland Asia;³
- European honey bees (EHB), *Apis Mellifera*, are honey bees native to Europe that were introduced into Australia in the early 1800s;⁴
- Native bees are bees found in most of Australia's diverse habitats;⁵ and
- Bumble bees, *Bombus terrestris*, presently only exist in Australia as a feral population in Tasmania.⁶

1.6 European honey bees in Australia are also referred to as being either *managed* (living in hives operated by humans) or as *feral* (living in the Australian environment without intervention, except for when they encounter humans). The term *wild bees* is also used to refer a combination of feral and native bees.

Related inquiries

1.7 The committee notes that there have been three previous parliamentary inquiries and another current inquiry on matters related to bees and pollination services. These inquiries are summarised below.

1.8 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry tabled its report on the inquiry into Rural Skills, Training and Research in February 2007. The report included recommendations that the Commonwealth government recognise the contribution of the beekeeping industry to Australian agriculture and horticulture by funding an entity such as a Cooperative Research Centre. The report also recommended that government guarantee the long term future of the honey bee quarantine facility currently housed in the Eastern Creek Quarantine Facility or make alternative arrangements for a permanent site.⁷ Issues related to quarantine facilities for bees are discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.9 In June 2008 the House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources tabled its report on the Inquiry into the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry, *More Than Honey: the future of the Australian honey*

3 Plant Health Australia, *Asian Honey Bee Fact Sheet*, p. 1.

4 *European honey bee*, <http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/animal-industries/bees/diseases-and-pests/asian-honey-bees/identifying-asian-honey-bees/european-honey-bee>, (accessed 2 June 2014).

5 *Which Native Bees are in Your Area?*, <http://www.aussiebee.com.au/beesinyourarea.html>, (accessed 2 June 2014).

6 How to identify a bumblebee, <http://www.aussiebee.com.au/bumblebeeid.html>, (accessed 2 June 2014).

7 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, *Skills: Rural Australia's Need*, February 2007, p. 149.

bee and pollination industries (More Than Honey).⁸ The report included 25 recommendations to improve the industry and secure its future sustainability.⁹

1.10 Several submitters to the current inquiry indicated that they were concerned that many of the More Than Honey recommendations had not been implemented¹⁰ however the committee notes that progress has been made on some of the recommendations.

1.11 Recommendation 9, related to treating varroa mite, is discussed in Chapter 2 of this report. Research funding, the subject of recommendations 16 and 24, and recommendation 25 related to a pollination services levy, is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses recommendation 11 related to quarantine facilities and recommendation 12, the Import Risk Analysis for varroa resistant bee semen. Food standards and labelling issues relating to More Than Honey recommendations 20 and 21 are discussed in Chapter 4.

1.12 The committee received evidence to indicate that the remaining thirteen More Than Honey recommendations that were supported by the government have been implemented to some extent.¹¹ Dr Doug Somerville provided the committee with a status report on implementation:

- a range of outcomes had been achieved for recommendations 2, 4, 8, 10, 13 and 14;
- aspects of recommendations 1, 3, 5, and 15 have been implemented with varying degrees of success; and
- recommendations 7, 22 and 23 covered matters for which responsibility rested solely or jointly with other jurisdictions.¹²

1.13 Recommendations that have been implemented either partially or fully and have been raised during the current inquiry are discussed in Chapter 2: chemical labelling (recommendation 4) and resource security (recommendations 5 and 7). Issues relating to recommendations 8, 10, 13, 14 and 23 are included in Chapter 3 on biosecurity.

1.14 The committee notes that recommendations 6, 9, 11, 12, 16–21, 24 and 25 of the More Than Honey report have not been implemented.¹³ The committee is

8 House of Representatives, *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 27, 16 June 2008, p. 374.

9 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources, *More than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries*, May 2008, pp xvii–xxii.

10 Mr Stephen Targett, *Submission 19*, p. 11; Mr David & Mrs Wendy Mumford, *Submission 30*, p. 5; Capilano Honey, *Submission 39*, p. 7; Beechworth Honey Group, *Submission 52*, p. 14.

11 Government Response, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources, *More than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries*, August 2009.

12 Dr Doug Somerville, *answer to question on notice*, 15 March 2014, (received 14 May 2014).

disappointed that such a large number of recommendations have not been implemented at all. The committee is also concerned that several important recommendations (made in the 2008 House of Representatives report) have been only partially implemented, or not implemented in a timely fashion. This has resulted in a situation where a number of expected improvements and benefits have not been delivered to Australia's beekeeping and pollination service industries.

1.15 In April 2011, the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee tabled an interim report on 'the science underpinning the technical assumption that the Asian honey bee, cannot be eradicated in Australia'.¹⁴ The interim report contained recommendations to reconsider the question of whether the Asian honey bee is eradicable from Australia. The government response tabled in November 2011 noted that consensus was not reached on whether the AHB could be eradicated but indicated that a \$2 million program would run from July 2011 to June 2013 to facilitate the transition from eradication to the ongoing management of Asian honey bees.¹⁵ Issues related to this decision are discussed further in Chapter 2.

1.16 On 27 March 2014, the House of Representatives Agriculture and Industry Committee was asked to conduct an inquiry into country-of-origin labelling (CoOL) for food. The inquiry is intended to examine the effectiveness of country-of-origin labelling and has some relevance to the committee's fourth term of reference on Australia's food labelling requirements, and how these affect the beekeeping industry.

Structure of the Report

1.17 The committee considered a range of evidence covering the terms of reference for the inquiry. Chapter 2 covers the importance of beekeeping and pollination services from a food security, environmental and financial point of view, as well as current challenges experienced by the beekeeping industry. Chapter 3 covers biosecurity matters, and Australia's food labelling requirements in relation to honey are covered in Chapter 4.

Acknowledgements

1.18 The committee thanks organisations and individuals who made submissions and gave evidence at the public hearings.

Note on references

1.19 References to the Committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard. Page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard.

13 Government Response, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources, *More than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries*, August 2009.

14 Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee, *Interim Report: Science underpinning to inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee*, April 2011.

15 Government Response, Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee, *Interim Report: Science underpinning to inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee*, April 2011, pp 1, 17.