



Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

FOUNDED 1892 REG No. A8347 ABN 88 895 471 810

Victoria's Peak Beekeeping Body – "For the Advancement of Apiculture"
Publishers of *THE AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL* (Monthly) since 1918

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Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Re: The Senate Committee of Inquiry into the science underpinning the viability to eradicate the Asian Honey Bee incursion in North Queensland.

SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Victorian Apiarist's Association (VAA Inc), the provider of this submission is the Victorian apiculture (beekeeping) industry peak representative organisation. The VAA Inc is the state's formal representative body of the Federal Council of Australian Apiarists' Associations Inc, representing Australia's honey producers on the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC), the national peak body which in turn represents all nationally coordinated apiculture industry sectors including farm crop pollination and the Australian Honey Packers' and Marketers' Association Inc.
- 1.2. On the 4th March, 2011, the VAA Inc wrote to the Victorian Minister for Agriculture, the Hon' Peter Walsh MP about the Commonwealth decision not to continue with the Asian Bee (*Apis cerana*) incursion eradication program, seeking support from the state's primary industry Ministerial Council for a reversal of the Commonwealth's decision. The letter is attached to this submission for the information of and consideration by, the Senate Committee of Inquiry. The Honourable Minister is yet to respond to the VAA Inc.

2. THE SENATE INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 2.1. The Science underpinning the technical assumption that *Apis Cerana*, the Asian honey bee cannot be eradicated in Australia.
 - 2.1.1. The VAA Inc has perused the Hansard record of the Senate Committee of Inquiry proceedings, 24.03.2011. The VAA Inc simply makes the observation that clearly not enough scientific rigor was sought or applied in the framing of the recommendation that led to the Commonwealth decision not to proceed with eradication beyond 31.03.2011.
 - 2.1.2. The VAA Inc therefore submits, the technical assumption that the Asian honey bee incursion cannot be eradicated is lacking in evidentiary substance and should be reviewed. Clearly, albeit later than sooner, the assembling of a numerically stronger, highly skilled eradication task force was beginning to produce promising results. In addition while not science based, the VAA Inc in it's submission to the Victorian Minister for Agriculture (attached) argues that, if for no other reason, the great national public benefit that would derive from a successful eradication program

should be factored into any review of the Commonwealth decision not to proceed with the eradication.

- 2.1.3. The technical feasibility of eradicating honey bees from a given area through the use of fipronil baiting is a proven technique (Perth, Western Australia, Manning, Department of Agriculture). Implemented by the skilled eradication workforce already assembled in North Queensland, the VAA Inc submits an opportunity exists to attempt to eradicate the Asian honey bee incursion with real prospects for success, and accordingly recommends the course of action for consideration during any review of the Commonwealth decision not to proceed with eradication. As pointed out by Dr Whitten in his evidence to the Senate Committee of Inquiry, local collateral damage to some non target species may result from a baiting program. Even so, when the diverse public good would be so well served by a successful eradication program, the VAA Inc submits the proposed means to an end solution would be worthwhile. The analogy of cutting living tissue surrounding cancerous growths to save lives is well made in this circumstance.

2.2. The science underpinning the assumption that the Asian honey bee will not spread throughout Australia

- 2.2.1. Eradication of an incursion of Asian honey bees has never been previously attempted by any sovereign state. To the best of VAA Inc knowledge, no science exists to underpin the assumption that Asian honey bees will not colonise most of Australia.

- 2.2.2. On the other hand, evidence has been provided to the Senate Inquiry that Asian honey bees are endemic to cold latitudes of the Eastern Asian continent, and in the highlands of PNG to an elevation of 16,000ft, where the incursion of Asian honey bees has occurred in recent history. The species is also endemic to northern hemisphere tropical, temperate and arid zones of the Asian continent. Therefore, the expectation should be that Asian honey bees will have the capacity to colonise most, if not all of the Australian land mass.

2.3. The science relating to the impacts of the spread of the Asian honey bee on biodiversity, pollination and the European honey bee.

- 2.3.1. Existing Australian environmental scientific knowledge gives rise to the expectation that an Asian honey bee population endemic to Australia will exist as a nation wide feral population of natural and urban environments. The bee is not suited for adaptation to commercial management by Australian beekeepers. Evidence has been heard by the Senate Inquiry that;

- 2.3.1.1. Where recent incursions have occurred in PNG and the Solomon Islands there has been a serious environmental impact.

- 2.3.1.2. Smaller Asian bees, a very high propensity for reproduction throughout the season, and smaller cavity requirements, will inevitably result in numerically, a much larger feral population, co-existing with the already endemic wild European honey bee population in Australia.

- 2.3.1.3. The colonisation of smaller cavities than are required by European honey bees in the bush and urban environments will particularly disadvantage the reproductive success of small arboreal mammals and avian fauna.

- 2.3.1.4. Additional competition for nectar and pollen resources will occur, reducing standing crops of nectar otherwise available to native fauna.

- 2.3.1.5. The expectation is that as wild colonies with limited foraging capacity range, Asian honey bees may provide some incidental pollination services to agriculture and horticulture. The Asian honey bee however is not suited to commercial management for crop pollination services due to its small colony size and its great propensity to swarm throughout each season. This high swarming incidence trait is a genetically induced survival strategy that has

evolved over millennia to enable the Asian honey bee to cope with the impacts of the Asian parasitic mite, varroa. Managed European honey bees will remain as an essential provider of pollination services to the growers of crops which have a dependency on honey bees to maximise respective yields.

2.4. The cost benefit of eradication of the Asian honey bee

2.4.1. The public and national benefit would be the most important beneficiaries of a successful Asian honey bee incursion eradication program. There is no cast iron certainty that a determined, well planned and well resourced effort would be successful. The VAA Inc submits however, use of the public purse to the extent of an estimated \$10million over two years would be justified by incalculable orders of magnitude should eradication be achieved. Reversal of the Commonwealth decision is one which would be applauded by an informed and appreciative public.

Yours Faithfully
Kerrin Williams
Secretary
Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc

cc: Liz Blandamer, Victorian Farmers Federation