

8 February 2014

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

RE: FUTURE OF THE BEEKEEPING AND POLLINATION SERVICE INDUSTRIES IN AUSTRALIA

(a) Importance of these industries from a food security environmental and financial point of view.

In Queensland there are around 3000 registered beekeepers of which 200 are full time beekeepers operating around 85,000 hives of bees. Honeybees are essential to the pollination of avocados, apples, pears, stonefruit such as peaches, plums, apricots, almonds and nectarines, cucurbits such as rockmelons, watermelons, cucumbers, zucchini and pumpkins, kiwifruit, macadamia nut. Seed production of onion, cauliflower, broccoli, turnip, brussels sprouts, carrot, parsnip, is dependent on pollination. Other crops such as citrus, cotton, sunflowers and canola greatly benefit from bee pollination although in the case of cotton most beekeepers stay well away due to the high risk of pesticide poisoning.

(b) Current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally and its future sustainability

With the continued land clearing for grazing both native and honey bee hive numbers have been greatly reduced due to habitat destruction. Access to floral resources is also a limiting factor on honey production. Many of the feral populations of European honeybees have also been greatly reduced since the arrival of the small hive beetle around 2002. In Queensland a survey conducted by Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries in 2010-2011 showed that 14.2% of large hives and 18% of nucleus colonies were destroyed by small hive beetles. This loss amounted to some 3 million dollars to the beekeepers and did not include loss of production or replacement cost.

The presence of small hive beetles has prevented export of queen bees and packages to Europe. As the Asian bee continues to spread in Australia importing countries may ban our packaged bees and queen bees for fear of spreading unknown diseases. This has happened between Australia and the United States of America.

Exotic mites *Varroa destructor* and *Tropilaelaps clarae* must be kept out otherwise the industry is at risk of collapse. Mite control would add more to the cost of production and the colony collapse disorder, which seems to be present wherever mites are present, would be devastating as evidenced in the United States of America.

The reduction of Apiary staff and funding for their operation across Australia and the lack of research into industry problems is limiting the ability of industry to handle many of these difficult challenges. There is no full time Apiary Officer in Queensland. Additionally, limitations to existing staff powers (for example, an Apiary officer in Queensland is not permitted to open a beehive unless the owner is present and presents them with frames for inspection) reduces their capacity to detect and prevent the spread of diseases. Bureaucracy also prevents timely interstate movement of bees as currently each state has different legislation requiring a beekeeper to obtain authorisation for interstate movement. This is proving difficult to obtain due to part time staff and their availability.

Extreme weather events have increased in frequency and severity and honey production has been reduced substantially, leading to more imports.

(c) Adequacy of current biosecurity arrangements for imported and exported honey apiary products package bees and queen bees.

The protocol for queen bee introductions seems to be working but to set up the new facility in Melbourne is ridiculous as the climate for bees to be introduced from the northern hemisphere spring/summer is autumn/winter in Melbourne (when it is too cold for bees to fly or breed). Why not Brisbane?

Exported live bees require inspection and documentation with some countries preventing the entry of Australian bees due to the presence of Chalkbrood disease (*Ascosphaera apis*) which they have in their country (Japan and Korea).

The cost of paperwork for Australian queen bees for export is becoming so great that small consignments are prevented from being exported.

With regard to honey coming into Australia there appears to be no limit or testing for the presence of residual chemicals. In one example a product called Victoria Honey was being imported and sold locally. Complaints were made and after having this product analysed in New Zealand (Australia cannot do this) it was found to be pure corn syrup and this process took 9 months. The Government has not taken any action.

(d) Australia's food labelling requirements and how they affect the beekeeping industry.

Australia's food labelling requirements are inadequate. The statements of "packed for somebody at a particular address" and "this is a blend of local and imported ingredients" are useless statements and are useless to the consumer. We want the percentage of the ingredient and its country of origin.

Large amounts of honey are being imported into this country at cheap rates and blended with local product. This enables the price to be kept low and residues blended down to the maximum residue level if that is ever measured. The large supermarkets with their ever increasing record profits are destroying Australian food producers and this is why many farms are in a situation of rising debt or bankruptcy. These supermarkets are actively driving down prices given to producers while costs of production through labour, electricity, fuel, machinery, seed and fertilizer and other input costs are rising.

Agricultural and Horticultural industries need to be able to afford pollination which in turn may assist in keeping beekeepers viable.

(e) Recommendations from House Standing committee on Primary Industries and Resources 2008 - More than honey: the future of the Australian Honey Industry and pollination industry. Rural Affairs and Transport Committee 2011, and Science underpinning the inability to eradicate the Asian bee and related matters.

The Asian bee incursion was not taken on seriously and too much time elapsed allowing this difficult pest to escape. The situation should have been handled by entomologists instead of veterinarians. Some of the people consulted on the expert panel were inexperienced with bees. Apiary officers were excluded.

There are discussions to be held regarding the cost of electricity in Queensland and those away from the large population centres seem destined to be charged more due to their remoteness. This will further disadvantage our struggling primary producers.

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Apiary Officer, 31 years specialty (retired)