

# **Submission to the “Science Underpinning the Inability to Eradicate the Asian Honeybee” inquiry conducted by the**

## **Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport**

By Peter McDonald of R&E McDonald - Apiarists

I would like to address your Terms of Reference, item (d) the cost benefit of eradication of the Asian honey bee.

### **BACKGROUND**

I am a beekeeper, who's family business has been keeping honeybees in Castlemaine since the latter part of the 1800's. This has been going on for 4 generations and we are currently operating with 4 family members running the business. We have all invested in this business our life, money passion and the dreams for the future for the ongoing success of the business for our children and theirs.

We have built up a large beekeeping business, based solely on the Honeybee. We produce honey and beeswax and undertake commercial pollination contracts for both the horticulture and broadacre industries. We also sell beekeeping equipment to other beekeeping businesses on both a retail and wholesale basis.

We have a policy of sourcing our requirements for the business from other local businesses wherever possible, which amount to a considerable investment in our local community.

We pollinate a variety of commercial crops on a regular commercial basis. They need to honeybee as it is the ONLY pollinator that can be brought in to flood the target crop and so ensure that the maximum number of flowers are pollinated to maximise the chance that a profitable crop can be produced. There is no other pollinator currently available which can be brought in at a moment's notice to undertake this task. Other pollinators could be bred specifically for this purpose, but at a huge cost. The major benefit of managed honeybees apart from their pollination efficiency is that they also produce other things when not undertaking the pollination task. So the cost for the pollination job is smaller as it doesn't have to solely support the costs involved in breeding and managing honeybee colonies.

The crops we pollinate include:

1. Almonds, Nth Western Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, no almonds.
2. Kiwi Fruit, Nth Eastern Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, no kiwi.
3. Nashi Fruit, Nth Eastern Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, small crop of small, poor quality nashi.
4. Pears, Nth Eastern Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, small crop of small, poor quality pears.
5. Stone Fruit (Peach, apricot, plum), Nth Eastern Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, small crop of small, poor quality stone fruit.
6. Cherries, Nth Eastern Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, small crop of cherries.
7. Canola, Riverina and all over Victoria. No managed bees to pollinate, smaller crop of seed with less oil content. Seed company canola will also see a dramatic decrease in seed volume available for broadacre farmers to plant.

## **COSTS OF NOT ERADICATING THE ASIAN BEE**

Following is a brief listing of what I consider the costs are in NOT eradicating the Asian Bee.

### **Our business/life/history GONE**

The cost of not eradicating this Asian Bee is that all we have worked for through the generations will be gone. We have made significant investments within our business over the years, especially in the last 6-7 years, and with no honeybee to farm it will all be wasted. This costs us in terms on money, but also in terms of our very life. Honeybee is us, it's what we do and has been for years. Take that away and we'll be devastated.

In addition to this, we employ 4 staff as well. They will be without a job. This business supports 7 families (employee and owners) and with no honeybee, no jobs. So factor in those additional flow on costs as we all have to rely on welfare, or be retrained in another profession, or re-locate elsewhere.

### **Loss of Beekeeping Hobby**

We sell the majority of our beekeeping equipment to small, hobby beekeepers. We expend a large amount of our time in talking and education them in the art of keeping honeybees. If this Asian Bee gets loose and makes it too hard to keep bees then many, many people will lose that pleasure of having a historic, natural and peaceful pastime.

### **Loss of horticulture & broadacre crops**

In addition to the loss of our business, a major flow-on is the loss of productivity and in some cases the crop altogether, without the honeybee to provide the intensive pollination required to set a commercial crop. So factor in all their losses as well, in all the same terms as any loss of business from an outside agency. The human, social and economic costs. As you can see it can start to snowball and some of the customers of the honeybee for pollination are not small, so their costs will be huge. The recent issues with the demise of Managed Investment Schemes is an example of what could happen, specifically in the Almond industry. But this time there won't be a saviour who will buy them out as with no managed honeybees there'll at worst be no pollination, no crop, at best be no intensive pollination or extremely expensive pollination, no profitable crop.

### **Human Cost**

The current cost that is accumulating now is the uncertainty over our future. While politicians dilly-dally and TALK about things, this Asian Bee could be getting further afield. Please stop! Both sides of politics know what the benefit to the economics of Australia the beekeeping industry is as there's been a relatively recent parliamentary inquiry into it. The ridiculousness of that though was the cost involved in undertaking the inquiry and then doing NOTHING about what it recommended.

We have for a long time been frustrated with inaction from governments to support our industry and this is just the latest. It is causing deep concern among the beekeepers about where their future lies with no support to us and yet money is thrown about fighting other pests/diseases such as fruit fly and horse flu.

## **NATURAL JUSTICE**

Beekeepers have for many years now been the victim of the "precautionary principle", which restricts our access to the forests on public land that we NEED to prosper. It is only fair that we now

get the benefit of this same principle for the Asian Bee eradication. Surely with the amount of evidence that this insect will be as bad as the cane toad, then the precaution that should be taken is to eradicate it NOW, when it's in a small area.

In recent years we've been the victim of 2 quarantine breaches, the Asian Bee in Cairns and the Small Hive Beetle in Richmond. When we are constantly the victim of a failed system where these pests get into Australia and create havoc with the honeybee, surely there's got to be an evening up somewhere along the line to knock them on the head before they get away and become endemic.

## **BENEFITS OF ERADICATING THE ASIAN BEE**

The main benefit of eradicating the Asian Bee is that the costs above will not be incurred. Even if the costs are hard to quantify in dollar terms, again we should be the beneficiary of the precautionary principle and the eradication made in case the costs that I have outlined above and many more that I didn't have time to outline are true and the Australian economy and people suffer as a result.

Another benefit for eradicating the Asian Bee is that Australia will gain another feather in its cap for quarantine, like it did when it eradicated Horse Flu. Only the second country in the world to do this and made it happen much faster and easier than South Africa did. Developing the expertise to successfully eradicate pests such as the Asian Bee (Java strain) that is in Cairns provides Australia with an exportable commodity in advice to other countries if it invades them. It hasn't got to many countries yet and so this could be a valuable resource for us to provide.

Getting rid of the Asian Bee will also allow us to further develop the beekeeping industry through the Honeybee and expand. We'd then be able to provide more pollination services, increasing productivity and profits for us and other farmers and Australia can benefit as a whole. More food produced, more money, less hungry people in the world and life is sweet.

## **SUMMARY**

So there you have it. Cost of not doing anything is dramatic compared to the benefit of putting in a serious effort to eradicate this pest. To me and many other beekeepers/farmers/people this is a no-brainer. Spend the money, eradicate the pest and safeguard our food crops. This is all we ask.

Please, stop the political wrangling and help us all out here.

- (a) the science underpinning the technical assumption that *Apis cerana*, the Asian honey bee, cannot be eradicated in Australia;
- (b) the science underpinning the assumption that the Asian honey bee will not spread throughout Australia;
- (c) the science relating to the impacts of the spread of the Asian honey bee on biodiversity, pollination and the European honey bee; and
- (d) the cost benefit of eradication of the Asian honey bee.