

Queensland Beekeepers' Association

Inc.



Branches at:

Brisbane:

Toowoomba:

Wide Bay:

Stanley River:

Warwick:

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Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc

SUBMISSION

to the

Senate inquiry into the management of the Murray Darling Basin – Impact of coal seam gas mining

Introduction

The Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc. (QBA) which was established in 1886 is the peak body representing beekeepers in Queensland.

It has branches at:-

- Brisbane, based in the Brisbane, Ipswich Gold Coast areas
- Warwick, based from Kalbar to Goondiwindi
- Toowoomba, based from Laidley to Roma
- Stanley River based from Petrie to Nambour
- Wide Bay, based from Gympie to Bundaberg and west to Kingaroy

It also has two sub-branches. One based on the Sunshine Coast and the other based on Cairns.

Many of the amateur Beekeeping Associations in Queensland are affiliated with the QBA.

The QBA is a member of the Federal Council of Australian Apiarist's Association (FCAAA) and also a member of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) which is the peak body representing beekeepers in Australia (see www.honeybee.org.au)

The implications for agriculture and food production and the environment:

The value of the Beekeeping Industry to Queensland

Even though some of our members do not reside in Southern Queensland this area is very crucial to the survival of the beekeeping industry in QLD. Many beekeepers from around the state migrate their hives into and around Southern Queensland to follow honey flows and carry out pollination on the various agricultural and horticultural crops that are grown in the region.

There are also many beekeepers from New South Wales who travel to Southern Queensland to gather honey and build up their hives for pollination.

It has only been in the last few years that the value of the beekeeping industry to the overall economy of the agricultural and horticultural sector has begun to be recognized. The beekeeping Industry is worth far more to these sectors than the amount of honey and beeswax produced.

I refer you to Hon Wayne Went MP Queensland speech when opening our 2009 State Conference where he said:-

“As we all know the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries plays an important role in supporting our primary industries, which contribute an estimated \$13.04 billion to the Queensland economy annually.

And as you can imagine the honey bee industry is an important factor in this production.

For instance in 2008 the House of Representatives Standing Committee enquiry into the honey bee industry, found that the contribution of pollination to Australia’s agriculture and horticulture industries was not only critical to production, but worth an estimated \$4 billion a year.

With this in mind it is important to note that Queensland also has significant agriculture and horticulture industries and the estimated value of pollination services in our state is around \$1 billion.

When you think about it, the value for pollination dwarfs the value of production from honey and honey products of \$80 million a year for Australia, with the Queensland value being about \$16 million a year.

For instance I didn’t know that horticultural crops such as almonds, avocado, carrots, onions and cauliflower are 100 per cent dependent on pollination by bees.

And many other horticultural crops such as mangoes and macadamia nuts are substantially dependent on bees for pollination, while other crops such as canola and pasture crops including

lucerne and white clover are also dependent on bees for pollination.

What is important to remember is that the Queensland Government is committed to the ongoing development of agriculture as a key contributor to the State's economy, and with that in mind there are a number of ways in which Queensland's department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is working with, and for the Queensland honey bee industry.

A copy of his full speech is attached.

There was a recent Federal Government Inquiry into the future of the Australian Beekeeping Industry by the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources and the title of the report sums up the current situation. The title was "More Than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industry." This denotes that the role of the honey bee in pollination is now becoming crucial to our rural economy.

This report can be found at

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pir/honeybee/report/fullreport.pdf>

Within south east Queensland there are many crops that rely on honey bee pollination for fruit set. Amongst these are:-

The cucurbit family e.g. watermelons, pumpkins, zucchinis, rock-melons

Seed production of canola and sunflowers

Kiwi fruit

Avocados

Macadamia nuts

Lychees

Stone fruit

Apples, Pears, cherries

Mung beans and Faba beans

In some of these cases, if there are no honey bees present, there is no crop.

The use of honey bees for paid pollination occurs in areas such as the Darling Downs, Western Darling Downs, Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys, Granite Belt, Burdekin District, Atherton Tableland and the Bowen, Bundaberg, Gympie and Glasshouse Mountains areas.

The need for Beekeepers access to State Forests

Beekeepers need continued access to Crown Lands including the State Forests in the Murray – Darling Basin area of Queensland so as to remain viable and thus provide the pollination of our food crops.

WHY?

1. Without continued access to these forests beekeepers businesses will not remain viable as:-

- The diversity of melliferous resources which are vital for providing nectar and pollen for hive survival will no longer be available.
- Hives need to be located well away from agricultural land to State Forests while pesticide spraying is being carried out on the agricultural land.

The State Forests in this area i.e. Queensland Government's Department of Employment and Resource Management (DERM), Forest Products, Cypress Forest Management Area (FMA)/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Western Region of Queensland, includes those Forests in the Barakula, Dunmore and Inglewood and Roma Forest Districts. There are approximately 4000 Apiary Sites in this region.

The Beattie Government when in power promised that 1,000,000 hectares of the Forests in the Cypress FMA/QPWS Western Region of Queensland will be transferred to National Parks as was done with the former State Forests in the coastal areas of Queensland. The current Bligh Government is pressing on to fulfill this promise.

Approximately 3000 Apiary Sites located within the coastal areas will be abolished on 31st December 2024 as well as all of the Apiary Sites located in the 1,000,000 hectares of new National Parks in the Cypress FMA/QPWS Western Region, with no beekeeper access thereafter.

2. Because the State Forests are being closed to timber harvesting before being transferred to National Parks, so the harvesting of trees suitable for hive survival which are located on *freehold lands* has increased to the point where the large areas of melliferous resources on freehold lands no longer exists for the Beekeeping industry to utilise.
3. Without viable beekeeping businesses, well managed commercial hives will no longer be available in the numbers that are required for the pollination of the crops as previously mentioned.

To occupy Apiary Sites on all State Forests in the Western Region, beekeepers are issued with permits to occupy designated areas within the forest. A fee is levied per Apiary Site and once the fee is paid the permittee is given access to the site on a 24 hours per day, 7 days per week basis.

A copy of an Apiary Site Permit is attached.

The impact of Coal Seam Gas mining

Vegetation

The major impact to the Beekeeping Industry will be the **enormous loss of valuable melliferous vegetation** in the Cypress FMA/QPWS Western Region State Forests where:-

- The area cleared of all vegetation around each gas well is 100m x 100m square i.e. one hectare.
- Gas wells are to be established in a 750 metre grid pattern in the Forests.
- There will be 40,000 more gas wells established i.e. 40,000 hectares cleared of all vegetation around gas wells alone.
- Main pipeline easements are 40 metres wide, cleared of all vegetation with five coal seam gas companies establishing pipe line easements through the Forests.
- New roads and pipelines are to be established linking all of the gas wells to the main pipelines.
- Damaging effects of high saline water on soil structure and subsequent plant growth.
- Clearing trees increases sodic/salinity problems.

Valuable melliferous vegetation includes:-

- Bluetop Ironbark *Eucalyptus fibrosa* subsp *nublia*
- Mugga ironbark *E. sideroxylon*
- Narrow-leafed ironbark *E. crebra*
- Brogans Ironbark *E. panda*
- Caleys Ironbark *E. caleyi*
- Mallee box *E. pilligaensi*,
- Hill gum *E. dealbata*
- Poplar box *E. populnea*
- Gympie messmate *E. cloeziana*
- Sand gum *E. chloroclad*
- Spotted gum *Corymbia critriodora* subsp *variegata*,
- Brown bloodwood *C. trachyphloia*
- Smooth bark apple *Angophora costata*
- Rough bark apple *A. floribunda*
- Several species of Wattle *Acacia*.
- The large understory of shrubs



A main pipe line easement 40 meters wide in Braemar State Forest



A gas well in Condamine State Forest with a 100m x 100m clearing around it

Apiary Sites

Apiary Sites have been established throughout the State Forests and are located no closer than 800m to 1km apart along the roads and tracks in the State Forests and are large enough to allow for the placement of up to 150 hives per Site. Apiary Sites average approximately 900 square metres in area.

Beekeepers are concerned about access to their State Forest Apiary Sites where:-

- Loss of established Apiary Sites when the coal seam gas companies establish gas wells, pipeline easements and new roads over the existing sites.
- Loss of the use of established Apiary Sites in the Forests when the coal seam gas companies take out Apiary site permits for the Sites that are adjacent to their operations.
- Fire danger where there are leaking gas wells adjacent to Apiary Sites.
- Dust hazard to hives located adjacent to roads with high traffic movements.
- Locked gates placed across roads entering the State Forests.
- Access may be restricted when access is essentially required. Particularly when beekeepers moved their hives onto their Apiary Sites for honey gathering and the pollen required for hive buildup prior to pollination of crops.
- Damage to existing State Forest roads preventing beekeepers vehicle access.
- Coal seam gas companies using Apiary Site to store their equipment, machinery, buildings.

Compensation for loss of Apiary Sites

The QBA submits that beekeepers need continued access to their Apiary Sites without restrictions being imposed, so that they can continue with their usual means of earning their living, rather than being paid compensation for the loss of the Apiary Sites and subsequent loss of income.

By beekeepers accepting compensation, the Apiary Sites will be deleted from the State Forest forever. Thus losing access to valuable melliferous resources which, in the long run, supports the beekeepers whose hives carry out crop pollination for the benefit of the Nation.

Only in cases where, for example, the vegetation in a State Forest is partially or totally destroyed by coal seam gas operations or by gas well blowouts, which in the opinion of the Apiary Site permittee, destroys the value of the Site to him, would compensation be sought.

Other factors affecting beekeeping in Queensland

Whilst not directly related to the coal seam gas industry, in Queensland the arrival of myrtle rust (*Uredo rangeli*) has the potential to change the way beekeeping is carried out in Queensland. For information on myrtle rust see

http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_17185.htm Predictive maps show that myrtle rust has the potential to affect the plants on the coastal strip where the temperature and humidity will allow the myrtle rust to flourish.

These maps show that the inland areas, where the coal seam gas drilling is taking place, will not be as affected. So it is quite feasible that commercial beekeeping will not occur on the coast as most of the plants our beekeeping industry rely on are in the Myrtaceae family and will be affected by myrtle rust. The beekeeping industry will then rely more on those Myrtaceae plants occurring in the drier areas where the coal seam gas drilling is taking place. So any loss of sites here has the potential to affect our beekeeping industry in the future.

Meeting with the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) together with Coal Seam Gas companies

QBA management committee members have met with representatives of two coal seam gas companies and DERM Forest Products.

DERM Forest Products staff were very positive and supportive of Beekeeper's continued use of the melliferous resources in the State Forests.

One coal seam gas company offered Apiary Sites on the properties that they have purchased. However most of the properties purchased were previously used for grazing and little melliferous resources remain on them. The properties would be more suited for grazing and the coal seam gas company representative said that they intend leasing their unused land to graziers.

Recommendations:-

1. Maintain the total number of existing Apiary Sites in any given State Forest
2. Establish a buffer zone of 100 metres between Apiary Sites and proposed gas wells. This can be achieved by locating the proposed gas wells away from existing Apiary Sites and then if necessary relocate the Apiary Site.
3. Continue access to Apiary Sites at all times without restrictions being imposed by coal seam gas companies
4. Wherever possible use the existing roads in the State Forests for the coal seam gas company's access to new and existing gas wells and for pipeline easements.
5. Reduce the amount of vegetation clearing around gas well sites and allow for revegetation.
6. Reduce the width of gas pipeline easements
7. Ensure that Beekeepers have access to all Apiary Sites in all of the State Forests at all times without any restrictions or impediments.
8. Don't establish new Apiary Sites on gas well pads because of the potential fire risks when using smokers around hives.
9. Don't establish new Apiary Sites on gas well pads because of the potential for coal seam gas company's contractors/employees to be stung particularly at night when flood lights are being used.

10. Do not allow any saline/toxic water to flow onto the vegetated areas surrounding gas wells.
11. Ensure that where coal seam gas company's contractors/employees damage existing roads/tracks in State Forests, the roads/tracks are repaired to allow continued unimpeded vehicle use.
12. Ensure that coal seam gas company's equipment, machinery, buildings are not placed on Apiary Sites

Summary

If a viable Beekeeping Industry which leads to food security is to be successful in the Queensland section of the Murray Darling Basin, it must be allowed to harmoniously coexist with the Coal Seam Gas Companies areas of operation without any detriment to the Beekeeping Industry.

The QBA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission and Trevor Weatherhead President, Daniel Jones Vice-President, Bruce Hibbett executive member, Rodney Smith Toowoomba Branch President and Bob Johnson State Secretary, would like to discuss or clarify any points in this submission with the Committee members at the hearing in Dalby on Tuesday 19 July 2011.

Trevor Weatherhead

State President

Publication References:-

- “More than Honey, the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries” The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources. Commonwealth of Australia 2008. ISBN 978-0-642-79057-3 (HTML version).
- “National Best Management Practice for Beekeeping in the Australian Environment” Dr Doug Somerville Technical Specialist Honey Bees NSW Department of Primary Industries; Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry Industry Partnerships Program
- “Pollination Australia, Biosecurity risk management.” David Brous & Dr Rob Keough. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Publication No 08/054. RIRDC Project No PRJ-002857
- “Guidelines for Rural Beekeeping in Queensland” Hamish Lamb Apiary Officer State of Queensland, DPI&F Q104110 ISSN 0727-6273
- “Code of Practice for Urban Beekeeping in Queensland” Hamish Lamb Apiary Officer State of Queensland DPI&F Q198044 ISSN 0727-6273
- “Commercial Beekeeping in Australia”. RIRDC Publication No. 07/059 Project No. FSB-2A
- “Honey Flora of Queensland” Queensland Government DPI&F Q187015 ISSN 0727-6273