Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Questions on Notice – Tuesday, 20 May 2014
Brisbane, QLD

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SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

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Questions Taken on Notice – Dr Denis Anderson

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1. HANSARD, PG 13-14

Dr Anderson: You know that CSIRO operates on a co-funding model. Government puts in a certain proportion of funds and industry puts in a certain proportion. If that money is not coming out of industry, generally the research is not carried out. Long-term research into Varroa mites is just not coming into CSIRO, and CSIRO is not doing the research. It is going to have a meeting in July up in Cairns to look into this, but it will get back to: where does it get the industry funding from? It is not going to get it out of RIRDC because RIRDC's funding is already taken up with research into small-scale farm gate problems.

Senator XENOPHON: I am very grateful for your evidence. Because we are running out of time, if you could provide a short supplementary note to the committee about where you think the funding priorities ought to be and from which projects we would get the most benefit in terms of protecting the industry and the broader agricultural industry in this country—in addition to what you just said about CSIRO; that was very useful—I would find that very useful.

Dr Anderson: Okay, I will do that.

CHAIR: Dr Anderson, thank you very much for your thoughts. They have been very, very informative.

Response - Short Supplementary Note:

Funding Priorities For R&D on Varroa Mite and Their Benefits in Terms of Protecting the Beekeeping Industry and Broader Agricultural Industry

(a) Research

- Develop eradication programs and improve border protection for *Varroa mites*.
  Benefit: Assists in keeping Australia free of the mites.
- Determine whether Australian honeybees are in decline, as they appear to be in other regions.
  Benefit: Helps define factors in the Australian environment that may already be detrimentally impacting on honeybees (such as insecticides or endemic pests and diseases).

- Improve the efficiency of crop pollination by managed honeybees.

  Benefit: Means more pollination with few bees.
- Survey Australian honeybees for traits that underpin tolerance to *Varroa* mites.

  Benefit: Identification of honeybees that could be rapidly developed to tolerate Varroa mites once they arrive in Australia.
- Develop improved understanding of the biology and pathology of the *Varroa*/honeybee interaction at the genetic and physiological level. In particular, examine the trigger mechanisms for *Varroa destructor* reproduction of honeybees.

  Benefit: Progresses the development of European honeybees that are totally resistant to Varroa mites (this also has global benefits).
- Advance the domestication of the Asian honeybee in Queensland, particularly for its use as a managed pollinator of commercial crops.

  Benefit: Provides an alternative pollinator to European honeybees in the event of Varroa destructor incursion.
- Examine the biology and pathology of the new form of *Varroa jacobsoni* affecting honeybees in Papua New Guinea. Also determine whether *Tropilaelaps* mites are present in Papua New Guinea.

  Benefit: Improves Australian biosecurity for honeybees.

(b) Development

- Improve dialogue and communication between the honeybee industry and horticultural industries that benefit from honeybee pollination (best done by the employment of a full-time consultant, funding by the beekeeping and horticulture industries).

  Benefit: Potential broadening of the funding base for R&D on pollination and improved co-operation between the beekeeping and horticultural industries.

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Questions Taken on Notice – Queensland Beekeepers' Association

1. HANSARD, PG 16

Mr Jones: Yes. We would like to know where the product has originated from.

Senator XENOPHON: Rather than just saying 'made from local and imported ingredients'.

Mr Jones: Yes. We would actually like to know what ingredients, where they are from and what percentage.

Senator XENOPHON: What percentage—okay.

Mr Jones: Which I am sure everybody in food processing would like to know.

CHAIR: I think most people would.

Senator XENOPHON: And nitrofurens are banned from local production here?

Mr Jones: That is probably a question best answered by the peak body.

2. HANSARD, PG 18

CHAIR: Just blame both of them, and they can defend themselves. You say:

One of Australia's largest supermarkets in 2002-03 had cheap Chinese honey high in antibiotic residue under their own private label imported from Denmark. The supermarket had the Chinese honey bottled in Denmark, no mention on the label that the honey originated in China. Australia's national reside testing authority (NRS) detected nitofurens in this honey. Industry and the NRS quietly had the honey removed from supermarket shelves

What is the problem for Australian families with consuming honey from China that has antibiotic residue in it?

Mr Jones: It is probably not as healthy for you.

CHAIR: Can bits of your body fall off? Can you get crook? Can you end up in hospital? What actually can happen? Or should I channel that to FSANZ or the department?

Mr Jones: Probably channel it to them. I know our peak body would be able to answer that one.

CHAIR: That is fine, Mr Jones. We will follow that one up

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Questions Taken on Notice – Wheen Bee Foundation

1. HANSARD, PG 25

Senator RUSTON: Could I ask, and then hand over to Senator Xenophon: have you read the review of Horticulture Australia that was released two weeks ago? There was a review undertaken by a company called ACIL Allen about the operation of Horticulture Australia, and exactly what you are saying was one of the recommendations. That is, it has to be cross-commodity, issue specific projects that start getting funded, instead of these little silos of citrus, almonds, apricots or whatever. The kind of issue that we are talking about here fits absolutely perfectly into one of those recommendations. So I would commend to you to read the review; and there is anything in there that you think could actually assist you in exactly what you are asking for, please get back to us, because it would be really helpful, because it helps in support of the progress of that review.
Dr Whitten: I do not know the details of that review.
Senator RUSTON: I will write the details down.

1. Response from the Wheen Bee Foundation

We would like to thank Senator Ruston for making us aware of the Horticulture Australia Review, and for providing a link to the report.

The proposed structure for New HAL appears to be one that would provide a greater benefit to the horticultural industries of Australia, particularly in its move away from the current "siloing" of individual industries and interests.

The existing ways in which industry funds are collected and managed tend to "orphan" the more cross-commodity general topics such as pollination services. This was clearly demonstrated during the development of a bid for a Corporative Research Centre (CRC) on Honey Bees and Pollination Services. There were too many vested interests operating within the HAL bureaucracy, which ruled out HAL as a significant partner in the proposed CRC. By the same token, individual commodity members of HAL felt that their support for R&D had been fully accommodated via their contribution to HAL. The unwillingness of HAL to support the CRC bid was a significant factor in the eventual abandonment of the CRC bid.

This proposed new HAL structure will provide an opportunity for cross-industry issues (such as the impact on pollination services of a varroa incursion) to be addressed through RD&E.

The single strategic plan as suggested under this HAL Review should take into consideration the importance of pollination for many members of the horticultural industry, and also factor in the impact on the horticultural sector of current and future issues that seriously affect the commercial beekeeping industry.

We note however, that it will obviously take some time to implement the New HAL structure, as proposed by the Review, and also that the final structure of HAL may not be as recommended by the Review. These issues could mean that any beneficial projects on preventing or minimising the impact of honey bee pests and diseases on pollination services to horticultural industries would not be funded by dependent industries for some time – and it is possible that the horse will have already bolted by the time the pollination dependent industries of HAL are in a position to contribute to this area.

The Review also raised some issues with regards to levy collection, and the complexity of changing this, which also rings true for the beekeeping industry.

The Review notes that reforming the levy arrangements is a complex and lengthy process. Also that the sunset dates for levies and customs charges regulations enabled by the *Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999* and the *Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Act 1999* are 1 April 2019. It has been indicated that the sunsetting instruments will be tabled in Parliament 18 months before the date of sunsetting. Any review and pathway forward for levies should be determined and finalised by August 2017.

The beekeeping industry should be consulted and considered in any changes to these acts.

However, there are workable options for the immediate term. Such as a levy collected from the providers of the pollination service, i.e. beekeepers – possibly via leading pollination service brokers. One such broker was prepared to collect $100,000 per annum for 8 years, at a $1 per hive servicing of almond crops, to provide a significant industry contribution to the Honey Bees and Pollination Services CRC, if it were to be established.

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2. HANSARD, PG 25

Senator XENOPHON: Dr Blair, do you want to add anything to that?

Dr Blair: No. Basically we are not doing enough, and there are two prongs to the attack that we need.

Senator XENOPHON: You have given a very useful submission. On notice, is there anything further—you may want to put this in writing—specifically that you think should be done in terms of prevention? You have outlined a number of recommendations, but if there is anything further in terms of going that extra mile in relation to the Varroa mite—

Dr Whitten: I think the industry has to be applauded for what it has done in conjunction with the government in relation to surveillance. What is missing though is the second prong of that, which is to prepare ourselves in terms of the establishment of Varroa, and that basically is not about the use of chemicals, not because of residues, but in other countries

you go on the treadmill and it is simply not the long-term solution. The long-term solution in those countries that have learnt to live with Varroa has been in producing strains of bee that have high hygiene; they can detect those cells in which the Varroa mite is present. They actually rip the cap off the cell and remove the drone and the Varroa. So we can do a lot of work, and I am pleased to say that industry is basically doing that work. And it is starved of resources to do that work. Again, food security is at risk because of that.

2. Response from the Wheen Bee Foundation

Developing naturally disease resistance honey bee populations, which work in Australian conditions

We need the funding and infrastructure for research into developing varroa-tolerant strains of bees that work well in Australian conditions. That is, honey bees with good "hygienic behaviour", which are better able to quickly remove pests or diseased bees from the colony, before the invaders can take hold and/or to prevent the invaders from killing the colony.

However, as our climate, conditions and flora are so different from other beekeeping countries, we already know that a "hygienic strain" that does well in other parts of the world will not necessarily do well here. So we need the time to develop strains with high hygienic behaviour, which are also good honey producers and manageable for our beekeepers. We know that there will not be just one strain that will work for the whole of Australia, due to the huge range in climates and flora within the country. For example, bees that do well in Tasmania don't tend to thrive in north Queensland.

If we have a varroa incursion and we are not more prepared than currently, beekeepers will certainly start using chemicals to control the mite – because if they don't they will lose all of their hives and their livelihoods. However, this will severely impact on our clean and green image and market edge. It will also mean that the mite will start developing resistance to the chemicals, so more chemicals will inevitably be used and/or different, more toxic ones will be introduced. This is exactly what has happened in other countries as varroa became established.

We have an opportunity to learn from the mistakes and the misfortunes of others – and we are the only significant beekeeping country in the world with this advantage up our sleave – it is shameful that we are not doing more with this advantage. As we and many others have outlined, the beekeeping industry is doing as much as this small industry can. However, it is in the public interest that the industry receives more help from government and from pollination-dependent industries.

Quarantine issues

We could start the process of breeding honey bees that are resistant to varroa now – if we had a useable quarantine facility and system in place. However, as outlined to the Committee elsewhere, this is certainly not the case. Locating the national quarantine facility in Victoria is far from ideal, logistically and climatically.

Furthermore, the recent two importations of queens for stock improvement programs – one successful, the other not so – illustrate the importance of ensuring that officers handling the bees in quarantine have the relevant competencies and experience, and/or that beekeeping industry experts be closely involved in the process.

Supports for beekeepers if varroa arrives

We also need a scheme that gives beekeepers compensation for losing hives. This will reduce the chemical use and speed the selection for varroa-tolerant bees that work well within the Australian context. It is unreasonable to expect beekeepers to let all of their colonies enter a "survival of the fittest" selection process, when we know most will not survive when varroa arrives. Therefore there will be a significant lose of bee stock, income and businesses. Without some assistance to enable beekeeping businesses to survive just when the country will be most in need of their pollination services, we will face a pollination crisis.

Better surveillance and possible eradication for the Asian honey bee

Although there are a number of surveillance hives around likely points of incursions, it would be far more effective if the hives were capable of actively attracting swarms rather then just passively providing a suitable domicile. Research by Dr David Guez, currently based in Cairns, suggests that commonly available scents such as almond essence could serve this purpose. That is, traps could be developed to more efficiently, effectively and selectively trap the Asian honey bee. Field trials with an improved and optimally scented and baited trap should be carried out around Cairns with the dual purpose of suppressing, even eradicating, the current population of Asian honey bees and creating a more effective surveillance hive program. Research related to these objectives has received support from the beekeeping industry via RIRDC, and the Wheen Bee Foundation is committed to providing additional support.

The spread of the current population of Asian honey bees around Cairns poses a threat to industry as it could mask subsequent incursions, and with them varroa might enter and even become established before it is detected. Consequently, continued research on design of a more efficacious and selective trap for Asian honey bees should be a high priority. The substantial benefits would flow though to the pollination dependent industries and the wider community in terms of food security. Consequently, a mechanism needs to be found for the beneficiaries to contribute, and for Australia to not rely entirely on the small beekeeper industry just because it finds itself on the front line.

3. HANSARD, PG 27-28

Senator XENOPHON: So there has been a cost-shifting to industry groups from state governments that previously played some of these roles. Could you provide some more information on that, on notice—not now; on notice, because we are running out of time, I think.

Dr Whitten: Do you mind also asking AHBIC about that? Because that is my take on reading this document—that those five biosecurity security officers are, in effect, substituting for what the states were doing before.

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3. Response from the Wheen Bee Foundation

Across the rural sector over recent years, there has been a shift in cost-sharing for services at both the Commonwealth and State levels of Government. This shift can be seen in particular relation to beekeeping. At the Commonwealth level, we have seen the introduction of a fee-for-service to cover costs of importing honey bee breeding stock. Unfortunately, the quality of service has been poor due to quarantine staff lacking the specific skills or experience to maintain the stock or provide good breeding material (eggs for queen rearing) in a timely manner.

Part of the proposed increased levy on honey production (from 2.3c/kg to 4.6c/kg) is to provide $75,000 to match a Commonwealth contribution for the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program.

While this program will directly benefit beekeepers by removing some of the issues for businesses to export of queens and package bees, there will be flow-on benefits to pollination dependent industries - which make no contribution. Also, as pointed out to the Inquiry Hearing in Brisbane on 20 May 2014, there is no levy imposed on imported honey to help finance this critical Surveillance Program.

The lion's share of the proposed increased levy is intended to finance five biosecurity officers (estimated cost $400,000) to help the industry deal with established pests and disease in each State. The States previously provided this function. A further $30,000 from the proposed levy is to cover costs of levy collection, previously met within the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture's budget. It is admirable that the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) and the State Beekeeper Associations are urging their members to support the increased levy, although there are substantial flow-on benefits to pollination dependent industries - who make no financial contribution. The public interest is also being served by the very small beekeeping industry – but again with minimal public funding support.

Because of the limited capacity of the beekeeping industry to accommodate an increased burden of costs, supporting research and services are not being maintained. This is illustrated by the failure of State Departments of Agriculture (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia) to replace apiary officers and researchers. Likewise, in CSIRO, with the retirement of Dr Denis Anderson, who was largely financed through ACIAR grants, there has been a net loss of bee-expert researchers. There is currently only one bee specialist scientist at CSIRO, and the funding for his position will cease next year. However, there is considerable bee related research capacity with Australian Universities (Australian National University, Macquarie University, University of Queensland, University of

Sydney and University of Western Australia), as well as the clear need for this to be supported in the public interest.

One objective of the proposed Honey Bees and Pollination CRC was to strengthen collaboration between these university-based groups, CSIRO and State Departments, with funding support coming from the Wheen Bee Foundation and a pollination broker (each contributing $100,000 annually for eight years). Our aspiration was that matching Commonwealth funding via the CRC program would have eventually attracted significant support from the pollination dependent industries.

However, because no real financial support was offered from pollination dependent industries that stood to benefit during the bid preparation, the bid was abandoned. The opportunity has been lost for expanded R&D, and for better collaboration on research and innovation underpinning viable beekeeping and pollination-dependent industries. The 2014 Commonwealth budget has exacerbated this problem with its reduction of support for R&D, apart from medical research.

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Questions Taken on Notice – Australian Honey Bee Industry Council

1. HANSARD, PG 30

Mr Weatherhead: With the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission response, from the outset we as an industry have been very disappointed at the time it has taken to do something about it. They talk about the Australian Consumer Law and how it is there to prevent mislabelling of products and things like that. We have certainly pointed out the two cases we have. We have another case of another product, again from Turkey, which we are waiting analysis of from overseas. Just last week I was also pointed out another product that is on the market in Sydney. It is the same country—Turkey. It looks like it has very similar labelling. They have different names. I am getting a sample of that and that will go—

Senator XENOPHON: What is it called?

CHAIR: We are going to get it off you. Lay it all out and tell us which supermarkets are shelving it too.

Mr Weatherhead: It is called Hecham Honey. I have a copy of the label here. It is very similar labelling to the Sunshine Honey, which is the one we are awaiting the results on. Similar type results, product of Turkey and different distributor in New South Wales. We are waiting for a sample of that and we will have it sent overseas to have it analysed.

CHAIR: Where do we find that product?

Mr Weatherhead: It is in the fruit shops in Sydney.

CHAIR: Just the fruit shops?

Mr Weatherhead: The fruit shops at this stage. Most of these products are sold through fruit shops. They are not sold on supermarket shelves or the like.

CHAIR: And you are tabling that evidence for us?

Mr Weatherhead: If you wish, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Yes, please.

Senator XENOPHON: Do these brands have a big map of Australia on them?

Mr Weatherhead: Yes, that particular one. I brought that one along as well. That was High Honey. I think I supplied that documentation to the committee after your hearing in Murray Bridge. That one was called High Honey and had a map of Australia on it.

Senator XENOPHON: So any reasonable consumer would assume it is an Australian product.

Mr Weatherhead: That is right. We would think that is the case. We have been very disappointed at the length of time it has taken for them to process this. This High Honey

one, for instance, has been going since February and they have not done anything about it. They say they are doing something, but in the meantime that product is out there and the public are buying it in good faith thinking it is honey when it is actually corn syrup. We complained under the labelling law. They call it honey but it is actually in these cases honey, glucose and fructose. Again, we would suggest that is in contravention of Australian standard 2.8.2, which gives a definition for honey. It does not comply with that. Why can this product stay out there the whole time and continue to be sold when we have shown conclusively it is not that product?

I have said to them that I am sure that if they suddenly had beef patties that had horsemeat turn up in them, they would have that off the market. One of the things they tell us is that it is not a public health issue therefore they are not going to do anything about it—that is from the department's point of view and from the states who enforce the food standards act.

CHAIR: While we are on that, Mr Weatherhead—and sorry to jump in but I am very keen to flush it out—what could the dangers be for us of consuming honey from Turkey?

Mr Weatherhead: I don't think there is any health issue as such It is just the mislabelling and the deception: you are buying a product thinking it is honey and it is corn syrup.

CHAIR: Unless it was something where politicians might get up and scream or there might be some directives from the ACCC, I have no faith in the ACCC—it is a toothless tiger; in fact, most of the time they are embarrassing. Could you release to the committee the correspondence you have had with the ACCC—or, if that give you a bit of grief, you might want to take that on notice?

Mr Weatherhead: I haven't got it with me but I can supply it to you.

2. HANSARD, PG 34

Mr Weatherhead: Yes. We put up, as an attachment to our submission, a proposed Australian standard; the current one 2.8.2 only has a definition of what honey is. It says it must contain no less than 60 per cent reducing sugars and be under 21 per cent moisture. I think that is all it says. We are trying to expand that. But currently we have not going anywhere with our representations to the departments. They do not really want to do anything; they are saying that it is not needed at this point in time and they do not want to try and put a standard in for us. We were in Canberra a few weeks back talking with Food Standards Australia New Zealand and they are not interested in doing something like that.

Senator XENOPHON: You have written to Food Standards Australia New Zealand about this?

Mr Weatherhead: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you provide to the committee—with the consent of the committee—details of that line of correspondence you have had to and fro with Food Standards Australia New Zealand and any other correspondence you have had with the government departments on the issue of food labelling?

3. HANSARD, PG 35

Senator XENOPHON: Going back to the ban on neoneconotoids, can you send the committee some of the papers that were relied on, if you are able to—if you are aware of some of the material that was relied on in Europe for that ban?

Mr Weatherhead: The decision was made in Europe, and I am pretty sure that quote came out of the European parliament for the decision that was made.

Senator XENOPHON: We can dig that up. If you refer us in the general direction, that would be fine. Thank you.

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Questions Taken on Notice – Australian Honey Bee Industry Council

Answer 1:

The committee accepted the answer in camera.

Answer 2

FOOD STANDARDS Australia New Zealand
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Office of the Chief Executive Officer

Mr Stephen Ware
Executive Director
Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, Inc.

Dear Mr Ware

Thank you for your letter (4 September 2012) regarding a number of issues pertaining to the honey industry in Australia. I will address these issues in the order that they were noted in your letter.

1. Twelve month extension on the continuation of ERL for paradichlorobenzene (PDB).

The extraneous residue limit (ERL) for paradichlorobenzene (PDB) or 1,4-dichlorobenzene in Schedule 2 of Standard 1.4.2. of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code) will expire on the 15 May 2013. However, the Code also contains a stock in trade provision in Subclause 1(2) of Standard 1.1.1. This states:

"Unless expressly provided elsewhere in this Code, a food product is taken to comply with any variation to this Code made from time to time, for a period of 12 months after the commencement of the variation, if the food product otherwise complied with this Code before the variation commenced."

You may wish to seek independent legal advice as to the applicability of the stock-in-trade provisions in the Code with respect to the twelve months following the expiration of the ERL for PDB. As this matter would be considered a compliance issue, it would be appropriate to consult with the relevant state and territory government agencies with respect to their enforcement of the ERL in the twelve months following its expiration. A link to the various relevant government agencies is available through the FSANZ website, http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandards/foodenforcementcontacts/

In order for goods which are not subject to the stock-in-trade provision to be legally sold after 15 May 2013, an amendment to Schedule 2 of Standard 1.4.2 to the effect that the dichlorobenzene ERL for honey is to be deleted at a later date, would be necessary. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, Inc. (AHBIC) could submit a formal application to FSANZ providing the necessary information outlined in the Application Handbook. This could be an unpaid or paid application but, if the former, the application would go on the work plan in order of receipt of applications and this may be a matter of months before consideration of it could be commenced by FSANZ. A paid application would start immediately after it had been formally accepted by FSANZ following an Administrative Assessment. In both cases the maximum timeframe for completion of the work, once commenced, by FSANZ under a general procedure would be 9 months, followed by a 60 day period for consideration by the

Forum for Food regulation. It is feasible the FSANZ phase could be shortened if the matter was of low complexity.

A link to the application process is available through the FSANZ website, http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandards/changingthecode/informationforapplicants/

Alternatively, if AHBIC could provide FSANZ with enough information we could consider this matter in a dedicated Proposal or in combination with other matters. However, there is no guarantee that this process could be completed before the expiry date of 15 May 2013 due to the statutory timeframes as described above and taking consideration of other priority projects being considered by FSANZ.

FSANZ staff would be happy to discuss these options further with you and the data requirements for progressing this matter. For example, we would need information on the current levels of PDB in honey and information on industry's continuing efforts to remove PDB from all honeybee products.

2. The Australian Honey Standard.

FSANZ has previously considered the provisions in the Codex Standard for Honey (CODEX STAN 12-1981) and noted that several elements of the Codex Standard were already adopted in the Code for all products, e.g. contaminants and labelling. FSANZ is not supportive of developing commodity only standards unless there are demonstrable benefits consistent with the objectives of the FSANZ Act. Unlike the Codex Standard for Honey that is a stand-alone commodity standard, the Standard in the Code for honey is supported by other standards in the Code that give consistent coverage for all food, e.g. contaminants, residue limits, labelling and warning statements. These standards ensure a consistent 'horizontal integration' of standards across all food, instead of a selective specification document for a commodity alone.

However, the industry could make a formal Application requesting changes to the current honey standard (Standard 2.8.2). This application would need to include a robust argument for including components of the Codex Standard for Honey, supported by contemporary data and which also addresses one or more of the objectives of the FSANZ Act. The primary objectives of FSANZ in setting a standard include:

- Protection of public health and safety
- The provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices
- The prevention of misleading or deceptive conduct

FSANZ would then consider whether there is justification for varying the standard as part of the application process. The link to the application requirements is given above.

3. Changes to Codex honey standard.

We are pleased to hear that your further research shows the removal of pollen may be an effective measure for reducing pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs) in food and feed and if this can be substantiated Codex Australia, via the Codex Committee for Contaminants in Food (CCCF), will work with you to remove the impediment to introducing this measure. As you may be aware the Codex Honey Commodity Committee responsible for the Codex Standard for Honey (CODEX STAN 12-1981) has been disbanded for several years, in line with a move within Codex not to develop further commodity-only standards, but instead to support the 'horizontal integration' of generic standards across all food. The Standard was last revised in 2000.

Following discussion with The Netherlands' chair of the current electronic working group of the CCCF on PAs in food and feed, FSANZ suggests that the Australian delegation could introduce the reduction of pollen-containing PAs by filtering as a possible risk-management option into the report to be considered by the next committee meeting. This would enable the CCCF to discuss how to take this matter forward for further consideration. FSANZ would welcome the opportunity to consider the AHBIC data supporting the efficacy of this as a risk mitigation measure for PAs in honey and to forward it onto the working group. Please note the timelines for doing this are tight as final papers will need to be prepared for next year's meeting by the end of this year. On this topic I would suggest that further discussions are held with who leads the Australian delegation to CCCF.

Yours sincerely

Steve McCutcheon
Chief Executive Officer

10 October 2012

AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

Web Site: www.honeybee.org.au
ABN: 63 939 614 424

4 September 2012

Mr Steve McCutcheon
Chief Executive Officer
Food Standards Australia New Zealand
PO Box 7186
CANBERRA BC ACT 2601

Dear Mr McCutcheon,

I write on behalf of the Australian Honeybee Industry Council the peak body representing the Australian Honeybee in Australia.

1. **Twelve Month Extension on the continuation of ERL for ParaDichlorobenzene (PDB)**

   As you are aware Industry and Food Standards Australia agreed that there should be extraneous residue limits place on PDB for a number of years which was to come to an end at the end of this calendar year.

   Industry notes that considerable effort has been made by our Industry to clean up the use of PDB in honey and this has been rewarded by continuing low levels of PDB detection. In the case of PDB detected these have all been followed up and in many cases were found to be accidental PDB usage at extremely low levels.

   Industry continues to pursue a policy of non-use of PDB and publishes warning to producers which have been largely successful. It is noted that although the limit is to be concluded by the end of the year, industry feels a further extension of twelve months would be one way to ensure that the success that has been made by Industry continues. It is therefore requested that a further twelve months extension be provided for the use of PDB.

2. **The Australian Honey Standard**

   As FSANZ would be aware the Australian Industry has been concerned for sometime at the lack of clarity of the existing Australian Honey Standard. In particular we feel that it opens the doors to imitation products and the Standard is so lacking in detail that it is possible for substitutes to be introduced into Australia to the clear disadvantage of Australian producers and consumers.

   The Australian Honeybee Industry Council would therefore ask FSANZ to explain why the Codex honey standard detail would not be also reflected in the Australian Honey Standard. It is our understanding that Australia is a signatory to the Codex

agreements and therefore we feel that adoption of some of the Codex honey standard in the Australian Standard would be both beneficial to Australian consumers and producers.

I would therefore welcome your advice on this matter.

3. **Changes to Codex Honey Standards**

As you may also be aware Industry has been concerned for some time that it may have an issue in marketing Australian honey because of the inclusion of Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids (PA's) in Australian honey. It was also noted that test results regarding filtration have been successful in removing Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids. It is therefore a possibility that filtration may be used to successfully reduce the amount of alkaloids in honey.

It is also noted however, that filtration is specifically disallowed under the Codex Standards and therefore Industry would request advice from FSANZ as to the methodology and required actions by which the existing Codex Standard could be altered to allow some form of filtration to remove alkaloids.

On behalf of the Australian Honeybee Industry Council I welcome your advice on the above matters.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen Ware
Executive Director
Australian Honeybee Industry Council

AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

ABN: 63 939 614 424

Web Site: www.honeybee.org.au

19 March, 2013

The Manager
Food Standards Australia and New Zealand
P.O. Box 7186
Canberra BC ACT 2610

Dear Sir,

Currently the Codex Alimentarius for honey has a moisture content for honey at 20%. Currently the FSANZ Honey Standard has a higher moisture content, which the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) believes is not in the best interest of our industry or the quality of our product.

AHBIC would request that FSANZ change the requirement for the moisture content of honey to be 20% in line with the Codex Alimentarius.

Yours faithfully,

AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC,

Trevor Weatherhead
Executive Director

Rec'd 10/5/13

FOOD STANDARDS Australia New Zealand
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Office of the Chief Executive Officer

Mr Trevor Weatherhead
Executive Director
Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, Inc.

Dear Mr Weatherhead

Thank you for your letter dated 19 March 2013 regarding a request for Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to amend the entry for the moisture content for honey in Standard 2.8.2 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code).

FSANZ acknowledges that the *Codex Standard for Honey* (CODEX STAN 12-1981) specifies that honey shall not contain moisture greater than 20% for all honeys except Heather honey, as opposed to the current limit of 21% in the Code. However, the commodity standards in the Code are not prescriptive. FSANZ pays regard to Codex standards but does not adopt them into the Code intact. This position is consistent with many other international food regulators. It is also important to note that the primary role for FSANZ is the protection of public health and safety with respect to food.

Nonetheless, if AHBIC considers that the moisture limit of 21% for honey is too high and represents a matter of *safety* for consumers as opposed to *quality*, then AHBIC is encouraged to submit an Application to FSANZ that provides a scientific rationale for the reduction of the moisture content in Standard 2.8.2.

Information on what information is required for an Application to change the Code, is provided on the FSANZ website,
http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandards/changingthecode/.

I trust this information provides a way forward for AHBIC with regards this matter.

Yours sincerely

Steve McCutcheon
Chief Executive Officer

7 May 2013

SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Public Hearing Tuesday, 20 May 2014

Brisbane, QLD

Questions Taken on Notice – Australian Honey Bee Industry Council

Answer 3:

For the third piece of information requested if you go to http://ec.europa.eu/food/archive/animal/liveanimals/bees/neonicotinoids_en.htm and click on the EFSA scientific reports it will bring them up.

You can click on the Regulation to bring up the actual regulation on the bans.

SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Public Hearing Tuesday, 20 May 2014

Brisbane, QLD

Questions Taken on Notice – Australian Queen Bee Exporters Pty Ldt

1. HANSARD, PG 50

Mr Taylor: Yes! You have probably heard a lot of talk in Adelaide and here about Varroa. We export bees all around the world, and I am surprised my company is still going after some of the things government have done to us. When they declared Asian bees endemic in Cairns the US cancelled a $2 million order with our company. When they increased 457 visas holder salaries from $38,000 to $52,000 I had about 10 457 visas holders. That put an extra burden on our company. But we have survived. We are still going.

Some of our customers overseas were saying, 'Your bees are not Varroa tolerant. They break down badly with Varroa.' So I said to my wife, 'Why don't we import some Varroa tolerant stock and use it for our exports and, at the same time, because of the size of our queen company we can disseminate it all around Australia'—with the exception of WA, which we have to do by semen because they do not allow adult bees in. So we decided we would track down the most Varroa tolerant stock in the world and import it. We found it in Saskatchewan, Canada. It had not been treated with chemicals for seven years and was holding up very well. We imported 10 queens. They arrived on 20 October. Before they arrived I went down to meet the people at the Eastern Creek quarantine station and I was less than impressed. I wrote to Canberra on 20 September—the day I came back from Eastern Creek—and said, 'I met the staff. They are very nice people and very accommodating, but I can see they do not have a lot of beekeeping experience. As our import is valuable not only to our company but to the Australian beekeeping industry, I recommend that you arrange a qualified person, such as Dr Doug Somerville, to be present for the first import.' Doug Somerville did a lot of work in handling bees in confined—

CHAIR: Sorry, but is what you are reading subject to any court proceedings?

Mr Taylor: Lawyers have written to the minister.

Senator XENOPHON: Under the parliamentary proceedings act, nothing said during parliamentary proceedings, including this committee, can in any way affect any court proceedings. Given that this, at worst, would end up as a civil matter, there would be no question of a jury being influenced. So I would like to see the documents. I will be subject to what the secretary says.

CHAIR: We will have a very short private meeting.

Proceedings suspended from 14:19 to 14:25

CHAIR: Thank you, everyone, for allowing us to have a private chat. Mr Taylor was giving evidence in relation to some issues outside of the committee's terms of reference. Mr Taylor, I put it to you that you may want to provide that information to the committee confidentially, and at our next meeting in Canberra we will decide how to address accepting that information.

Mr Taylor: I would like to present all this evidence to your committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Taylor.

Senator XENOPHON: Do we need a motion to accept that formally?

CHAIR: Okay.

Senator XENOPHON: So moved.

2. HANSARD, PG 51

Senator XENOPHON: It seems to be more of a direct issue, where, I would suggest, if you have concerns, you should raise them with the minister for immigration and the assistant minister, Senator Cash. But doesn't that also beg the question: are there issues about the training? Are there no training pathways for young people to become beekeepers?

Mr Taylor: No. They have all been closed down.

Senator XENOPHON: Well, that is another issue, isn't it?

Mr Taylor: Yes. Hawkesbury college had a beekeeping course; it was closed down. Gatton had one; it was closed down.

Senator XENOPHON: Maybe that is an issue as well—the fact that there is a lack of appropriate training courses for people to become beekeepers. If you could provide some more information to us about the closure of those courses, that might be useful.

3. HANSARD, PG 54

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Do you have a plan of how you would like to see it, clearly taking into account the philosophy behind some of the conditions and restrictions?

Mr Taylor: No. I think the English requirement is going to stop us bringing people in.

CHAIR: But you can work with that. If they are attending class—I know it is an impost if they are out bush. In the previous government I worked with the department in assisting employers who were using 457 visas workers in WA, but in all fairness they were not out scrub every couple of weeks or miles away. I am sure there was flexibility around that. I struggled with the English language and I am 54.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I can confirm that—not that he is 54!

CHAIR: I know all the right words.

Mr Taylor: Anyhow, we have employed a new immigration consultant, so we will work through it.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: If you have an immigration consultant and he wanted to drop us a one-page letter with some suggestions that might be useful, it would be interesting to have a look at it.

Mr Taylor: Would you prefer that from going straight to the minister?

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Yes, it could go straight to the minister, but it could also —
CHAIR: It could sit in the inbox for a while.
Senator IAN MACDONALD: Do not send it to me; send it to the secretary.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 1

Topic: National Bee Pest Surveillance Program

Proof Hansard page: 56

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Dr Grant, you have heard the evidence from some of the witnesses today. There is a concern in relation to the Varroa mite, on prevention, they say that, paradoxically, there has been a great improvement in dealing with surveillance and dealing with these issues since the Asian honey bee incursion—that has been a silver lining to that cloud. We heard from Dr McKee, in relation to surveillance hives, one constructive suggestion that there ought to be more surveillance hives. Can you tell us what the extent of surveillance hives is at the moment and whether there are plans to improve in respect of that.

Dr Grant: We all obviously work as a team and various people here will take various questions. In that context, Mr Nixon will take the beginnings of this question.

Mr Nixon: In relation to the hives, we also have bee boxes located at ports around Australia, which a number of industry witnesses have mentioned today.

Senator XENOPHON: Where is that again, sorry?

Mr Nixon: In a number of ports around Australia.

Senator XENOPHON: How many?

Mr Nixon: I do not have the exact numbers.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you provide those details on notice?

Mr Nixon: I am happy to provide those numbers, absolutely.

Senator XENOPHON: Roughly, which ports? Northern Australia or all over?

Mr Nixon: Major Australian ports around Australia. All regional major Australian ports.

Senator XENOPHON: What does that mean? Is there one in Port Lincoln, for instance?

Mr Nixon: No. Major ports where we have a lot of seaports and airport traffic, such as our major capital cities. We also have some hives in Cairns, obviously, as well as in Townsville. Essentially, the traps themselves are coordinated in cooperation with Plant Health Australia and administered by the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program at a national level. We obviously have local arrangements in place, and Department of Agriculture staff visually monitor the bee boxes for the presence of any bee activity. If bee activity is observed state and territory apiarists are notified for any further action. We have just started trialling smart traps in Brisbane. There are currently three traps in the port area. They consist of a box that is monitored through the use of an internal camera, which alerts the user and provides images when an organism enters the box.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 1 (continued)

Answer:

The National Bee Pest Surveillance Program, which replaced the National Sentinel Hive Program in 2012, is a risk-based surveillance program for bee pests and pests of bees at high risk ports. It is administered by Plant Health Australia and is funded jointly by the Australian government ($66,000 per annum), Horticulture Australia Limited ($75,000 per annum) and the honey bee industry ($75,000 per annum) until 30 June 2015, at which point a review will be undertaken. This builds on funding provided by the Australian Government since 2000 for surveillance activities at high risk ports to provide early warning for bee pests.

During 2013 as part of the program, 128 sentinel hives for bee parasites were maintained at seaports and airports across Australia that receive significant volumes of imported cargo or regular berthing of vessels from international locations where exotic pests of honey bees are known to occur (Table 1). This is an increase from the 26 sentinel hives that were managed throughout Australia in 2011, and 92 sentinel hives that were managed throughout Australia in 2012.

Table 1: Locations of sentinel hives included in the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program

State/territory	Name of area (number of sentinel hives)	State/territory	Name of area (number of sentinel hives)
New South Wales	Port Botany (6)	South Australia	Port Adelaide (6)
	Newcastle (6)		Port Pirie (6)
	Wollongong/Port Kembla (6)	Tasmania	Hobart (8)
	Richmond (1)		Devonport (4)
	Goodward Island (1)		Bell Bay (4)
	Darling Harbour (1)		Burnie (4)
	Kurnell (1)	Victoria	Melbourne (5)
	Chifley (1)		Geelong (10)
	Jervis Bay/HMAS Creswell (1)		Portland (2)
Northern Territory	Darwin (4)		Westernport (5)
	Darwin Airport (4)	Western Australia	Fremantle (6)
	Berrimah Farm (4)		Kwinana (1)
Queensland	Brisbane (6)		Perth Airport (4)
	Cairns (6)		
	Townsville (6)		

Additionally, during 2013 more that 54 catch boxes (empty hives) were deployed as an additional surveillance measure for detecting swarms of exotic bees, as well as an effective means of continually testing the local population of European honey bees.

Trials on remote surveillance catchboxes are currently being undertaken, with five remote surveillance boxes being placed in Brisbane, Gladstone and Weipa (Queensland) and Darwin (Northern Territory).

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 2

Topic: Incoming bee swarms at airports

Proof Hansard page: 57

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: One of the constructive criticisms from the industry was that these surveillance hives are a good idea. They would like to see more so that it covers a field as comprehensively as possible. How much of our incoming sea traffic, or cargo, does it cover at the moment? Can you tell me in broad percentage terms?

Mr Nixon: In relation to sentinel hives, where we have all first ports around Australia where we have seaports activity, that is essentially where the hives are set up.

Senator XENOPHON: Are they at airports as well?

Mr Nixon: The only one I am aware of where we do have hives at airports is in Melbourne.

Senator XENOPHON: Why only Melbourne?

Mr Nixon: The purpose of Melbourne is actually to determine the effectiveness of beehives at airports. Since 2002, I guess, there has been a low incidence rate of bees found in airports. A lot of the bees that have been detected are normally single bees and through risk analysis they are not likely to survive any further than a couple of days, because they do not have their swarming bees.

Senator XENOPHON: So there has been no evidence of any swarms been found at airports.

Mr Nixon: Not that I am aware of.

Senator XENOPHON: Would you take that on notice?

Mr Nixon: Certainly.

Answer:

No incoming bee swarms have been detected at an Australian airport.

Since 2000 there have been six detections of live giant honey bees (*Apis dorsata*) associated with incoming aircraft or aircargo. On each of these occasions the number of incoming bees was less than 10 individuals.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 3

Topic: Sentinel hive program and biosecurity arrangements for vessels arriving in Australia

Proof Hansard page: 58

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Do you think you can reduce the chance of it coming into this country?

Dr Grant: That is precisely the objective of the Sentinel Hive Program at the major ports where the major traffic of imports comes through.

Senator XENOPHON: Has the department given a view to government as to whether the Sentinel Hive Program ought to be expanded?

Dr Grant: I would like to take that on notice. I am not familiar with whether that advice has been provided or not.

Senator XENOPHON: Does the department have a view as to whether the Sentinel Hive Program ought to be expanded?

Dr Grant: I will take that on notice as well.

Senator XENOPHON: The industry is saying that there should be more practical measures, particularly in respect of sentinel hives and ensuring compliance. I think there is an education program with captains of ships in particular to ensure that they check for swarms. How is that enforced? How is that rolled out? Is it an education program? Do quarantine officers ask that question as a matter of course of any captain of a ship? In practical terms, how is that dealt with and enforced?

Dr Grant: Given that you have asked the question, we will take that on notice and respond to the Senate with a fully comprehensive answer to that line of questioning.

Senator XENOPHON: Also as part of that question, is every boat or ship examined? How thorough is the process? What mechanisms are there to ensure compliance?

Answer:

1. The purpose of the National Bee Surveillance Program is to provide early warning of bee pests and pests of bees. This program, along with the department's biosecurity measures are aimed at reducing the risks of pests and diseases entering Australia.

   During 2013 as part of the program, 128 sentinel hives for bee parasites were maintained at seaports and airports across Australia that receive significant volumes of imported cargo or regular berthing of vessels from international locations where exotic pests of honey bees are known to occur. This is an increase from the 26 sentinel hives that were managed throughout Australia in 2011, and 92 sentinel hives that were managed throughout Australia in 2012.

Question: 3 (continued)

Following an assessment of the risks associated with each port and past interceptions, the location and number of sentinel hives will vary from next financial year to enable a greater focus on higher risk ports. A range of new surveillance techniques will also be incorporated to improve the chance of detecting exotic pests. A review of the program will be undertaken in 2015.

2. The department has a multi-faceted approach to inform vessel Masters about the biosecurity significance of hitch-hiker pests that may be inadvertently present on their vessel and the need to report detections. This includes:
    - Information available from the Department of Agriculture's website
    - Completion of a Quarantine Pre-arrival Report (QPAR). All commercial vessels are risk assessed prior to arrival in Australia through a legal requirement to lodge a QPAR to the department 12 to 96 hours from port that includes responses to the questions:
        - *Were any insects, including bees, discovered on board during this current voyage?*
        - *If YES, describe the insects and their location when discovered on the vessel?*

Masters of arriving international vessels are required to report whether they have discovered any bees on board during the voyage through this process. Should a positive response to the bee question be received, the department liaises with the vessel to manage the risk.

It is a legal requirement for a vessel Master to lodge a QPAR (excluding non-commercial vessels). Incidents of non-compliance may be referred for investigation with a view to prosecution as an offence under the *Quarantine Act 1908* (the Quarantine Act) with a maximum penalty of imprisonment for two years (s27A(5)).

Not all vessels are risk assessed as part of the QPAR reporting process. The inspection of vessels takes into account vessel compliance history. All non-commercial and high risk vessels are inspected upon arrival.

Officers perform deck inspections as part of their routine vessel inspection process to detect biosecurity pest risks associated with the vessel. This inspection will be at a level that takes into account the pests reported by the Master in the QPAR. Officers inspecting vessels may ask questions of the master or crew about pests that may inadvertently be present on the vessel (commonly including, but not limited to, questions about bees or ants) and if they had been found/reported to the Master. Officers may also reinforce the importance of Masters making themselves aware of pests on their vessel and reporting any detections. The officer verifies a Master's answers provided in the QPAR and from interview through the inspection process.

Question: 3 (continued)

Providing false or misleading information to an officer is an offence under the Quarantine Act with a maximum penalty of one year (s27A(6)). Persons providing false or misleading answers to a quarantine officer's questions about a biosecurity matter may be guilty of an offence under s70A of the Quarantine Act.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 4

Topic: Maximum Residue Limits for chemical residues.

Proof Hansard page: 60-61, 62

Senator MACDONALD asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I do not want to labour the point—just so I understand. So, when Australian producers of various primary products say, 'We would love to use that chemical but we're prevented,' you are saying that the reason for that is the ecology, natural environment, natural—

Mr May: It might be any one of a number of reasons, Senator. It could be an occupational health and safety reason, it could be an environmental reason—perhaps my colleague should take the question at this point.

CHAIR: They are not coming to your rescue, Mr May.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I did not actually think it was a question for FSANZ. I am not sure if I am being clear. Do you understand what I am asking?

Dr Grant: When you talk about the industry wanting to use a chemical in Australia that overseas producers have the benefit of, the question that arises is: what is that chemical being used for? Is it for enhancing production? If that is the case, then it becomes potentially an APVMA issue. And, usually, that is why chemicals would be used. Then it becomes a problem, potentially, if it is in breach of an MRL level for human health consumption. So it really depends on where the chemical is and for what purpose that chemical is being used. Some chemicals, for example, are used for washing a product after it has been partly processed. That would be exclusively a health management issue. But, if it is a production chemical to enhance the production and it may have some lingering contamination implications, that becomes a mixture of: what is the approval level for use and does it have an MRL impact and a breach of that MRL level in food consumption? It is an issue that spans those sorts of things.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: But, Dr Grant, I am sure you have heard it—

Dr Grant: Many times.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I just cannot think of the examples and we are talking about bees. Australian producers often come to me and say, 'We are competing against this product. They are allowed to use X and we are not allowed to use X, and because of that they get an advantage.' It was suggested to us earlier in some evidence that there was something happening with imported honey that Australian honey could not take advantage of.

CHAIR: It is not like real honey, it includes corn syrup. So watered down honey, so to speak.

Senator XENOPHON: That is the nub of the issue, that Australian honey producers are saying they are at this disadvantage. They are not suggesting they want to use the chemicals but they are saying that this other stuff can be brought in with cheaper cost of production by virtue of the chemicals that they use. That is the nub of it, isn't it? They are competing unfairly.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 4 (continued)

Dr Grant: I suppose the issue is that if we could be more specific about what the chemical is we can probably deal with the question. We are trying to deal with it rather generically at the moment without being able to know.

Senator XENOPHON: Is it nicotinoids?

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Could you get someone to have a flick through the Hansard evidence when it comes out and give us an answer on notice. I am sure it was mentioned earlier on—

CHAIR: It came up in Murray Bridge as well.

From Page 62

Dr Grant: Before we leave this, if I may, you asked whether we would scan the Hansard and come back with a response. Both APVMA and Agriculture are in front of the Senate committee next week. We will certainly do that and come back with regard to those chemicals that have been mentioned in the record of Hansard to date.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: As I say, it is a wider issue. It is a common complaint. Very often the complaints you get are not based on fact, but that is one that has been around for a long time. Overseas producers can do it and bring their product into Australia. Australia could use the product and get a better result or a cheaper result, but it is banned in Australia. I hear the distinction you are making, which makes quite clear sense, but I would just like to take up, in this inquiry, the issue that was raised by one of the bee people earlier.

Dr Grant: Without passing a hospital pass, I will suggest that it is probably most logical to ask that question in the APVMA session. Several of us will be there to back up, but it is easier to handle it in one place rather than several.

Answer:

Internationally, countries set maximum residue limits (MRLs) for residues of agricultural and veterinary (agvet) chemicals in foods according to good agricultural practice or good veterinary practice.

Agvet chemicals are used differently in different countries around the world because pests, diseases and environmental factors differ and because product use patterns may differ. This means that residues in imported foods may differ from those in domestically produced foods, but may still be at safe levels.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission—established by the Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Health Organisation—develops harmonised international food standards. Such standards include internationally agreed residue levels for some chemicals, which many countries automatically adopt. Australia actively engages with Codex in the setting of these Codex MRLs in recognition of the benefits to international trade in agricultural produce.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 4 (continued)

Food Standards Australia New Zealand's (FSANZ) assessment process allows consideration of harmonising with an MRL established by Codex or by a regulatory authority of a trading partner. There are mechanisms to advocate for specific MRLs in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, including writing to FSANZ where an anomaly between the code and an international standard is identified for residues that may occur in food. FSANZ considers and assesses such requests on a case by case basis, including through raising an MRL proposal.

FSANZ's assessment will consider the legitimacy of use in the importing country and whether, in the context of the Australian diet, consumption of chemical residues that may occur in food is within health-based guidance values set by the Australian Government Department of Health. Dietary exposure assessment is conducted by FSANZ according to international best practice.

The response to written question on notice question 4 provides details of the current and past border testing of imported honey. This testing includes analysis for the presence of Chloramphenicol and Nitrofurans residues, both of which have been implicated in concerns about imported honey. There are no maximum residue limits for these chemicals in honey and consequently any detected residue would result in the food being failed under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 5

Topic: Australian Border Force

Proof Hansard page: 60-61

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: My final question is a broad one, and this relates to the budget announcement of the Australian Border Force. What is the role of Biosecurity in that force? Does Biosecurity have a role in respect of that force?

Dr Grant: No. The Border Force is going to be an amalgamation of Customs and Immigration functions. I am not familiar with exactly what level of amalgamation, but the biosecurity elements of the agriculture department are not involved in that process.

Senator XENOPHON: That intrigues me, because, if Customs is also about stopping pests and biosecurity threats coming in, why isn't Biosecurity involved in that?

CHAIR: You might ask the previous minister.

Dr Grant: Again, I will take it on notice, but Customs is about illegal imports, and Biosecurity is about biological pest and disease incursion. These are not one and the same thing.

Senator XENOPHON: I realise that, but sometimes something could be coming into this country inadvertently. I am just wondering how the Australian Border Force is going to interact with Biosecurity. That is my question.

Dr Grant: I do not see that it will be any different from the way it interacts at the moment—that is, we interact with both those agencies. They will be an amalgamated agency.

Answer:

The Australian Border Force will act as a frontline enforcement agency drawing together the operational border, investigations, compliance, detention and enforcement functions of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

The biosecurity services provided at the border by the Department of Agriculture involves a diverse range of import and export functions. The department has integrated many of these services across the biosecurity system and includes inspectors who work across imports and exports and the department's many scientists, veterinarians and lawyers who provide essential support for border staff in their operational decision making.

The Department of Agriculture works closely with Customs where synergies exist for border services such as processing of international passengers and inspection of international mail. This work is expected to continue with the Australian Border Force to ensure a streamlined border experience for travellers and importers.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 6

Topic: Commonwealth controlled parks

Proof Hansard page: 62

Senator MACDONALD asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Dr Grant, I know you were here earlier. You heard some comments about use of forests and, at some stage, restricted use of forests. I would suspect that most of those are issues for the various state governments, but, in Commonwealth national parks, do we have any policy on ability to use those forests for bees? If so, is there a rationale behind it? Would you like to take that on notice? It is a bit left field.

Mr Ottesen: It is. We will have to take that on notice, if that is all right.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I would be interested to know (a) whether there is any restriction in Commonwealth controlled parks and, if so, (b) what the rationale for that is, because it is a rationale that on some occasions I would challenge. Could you take that on notice.

Mr Ottesen: Yes.

Answer:

The Department of Environment has provided advice that the keeping of bee hives and bees in Commonwealth reserves (established and managed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*) would need to be authorised by a reserve management plan. Commonwealth reserves include: the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Booderee National Park, Christmas Island National Park, Norfolk Island National Park, Pulu Keeling National Park and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

Bee keeping is not currently authorised in any Commonwealth reserves. The approval of the Director of National Parks would be required before bee keeping could be conducted in a Commonwealth reserve. We are not aware if approval has previously been sought for the activity.

Allowing the introduction of species that are not native to a reserve area is not generally supported because of potential impacts on native species indigenous to the area.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 7

Topic: Testing of imported honey

Proof Hansard page: 65

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Have there been any adjustments in the testing of imported honey in light of incidents last year of honey contaminated by antibiotics in the UK?

Dr Grant: We will take that question on notice. I am looking at my colleagues and none of us can answer that question. I do not know.

Senator XENOPHON: It is a pretty significant incident; would you agree?

Dr Grant: Yes, I agree.

Senator XENOPHON: Further to that, do existing testing laboratories have the capacity to test for more contaminants in imported honey than are currently tested for?

Dr Grant: The National Residue Survey is where we would need to go for the answers for that.

Senator XENOPHON: What preventative measures does the department take where there is information that a country has exported contaminated honey to other locations?

Dr Grant: In Australia?

Senator XENOPHON: To Australia, yes.

Dr Grant: Can we take that one on notice as well?

Senator XENOPHON: Sure. I just wanted to ask—

Mr May: I can partially answer that. Within FSANZ we do coordinate action with the states and territories and New Zealand in the event that a food incident has some public health and safety impact. The first thing we would have to determine is whether there were a public health and safety impact, but we are constantly monitoring the media and other sources, and, if we were aware that a product was coming in that had a public health and safety concern, action might be taken to take that product off the market, through the states and territories.

Answer:

There were no adjustments to the testing of imported honey following the reports of Chloramphenicol detection in UK honey. Chloramphenicol is already in the Australian Imported Food Inspection Scheme screen of tests applied to imported honey.

The department has not asked testing laboratories about their capability for testing for the presence of other contaminants in imported honey. However, it is likely laboratories in Australia have additional capability.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 7 (continued)

Where information is provided to the department concerning contaminated food that has been exported by a country to other locations, the department may seek risk assessment advice from Food Standards Australia New Zealand to assist in determining appropriate border action. Such action may include targeted increased border inspection to test specific food for a specific hazard.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 8

Topic: Testing of imported honey

Proof Hansard page: 66

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Can someone explain to me or to the committee why Australia does not subject other countries which seek to export into Australia to the same survey?

Dr Grant: Again, we do not have people from the National Residue Survey here. I would like to take that on notice, and we will direct you to that party and get an answer for you.

Answer:

The Imported Food Inspection Scheme (IFIS) is a product inspection and testing scheme for food as it is imported to Australia. It does not require countries to undertake surveys of their industry as a condition for market entry to Australia.

The IFIS is a risk based inspection scheme, informed by outcomes from risk assessments undertaken by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

As a risk based scheme, for surveillance foods such as honey, the focus has been on those chemical residues that are considered of greater significance, rather than apply a broad residue screen.

Monitoring of Australia's food supply is conducted by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) which monitor the levels of contaminants in the Australian food supply through focused surveys and the Australian Total Diet Study (ATDS). The ATDS covers both domestically produced and imported food. Outcomes from the ATDS inform government regulatory activity, such as the types of testing undertaken on imported food. The 23rd ATDS, published in November 2011, showed that levels of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in food remains safe. These studies are conducted approximately once every two years and are available from the FSANZ website at: www.foodstandards.gov.au/science/monitoring/Pages/australiantotaldiets1914.aspx.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Department of Agriculture

Question: 9

Topic: Asian honey bee transition to management plan

Proof Hansard page: 66

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: In terms of the Asian honey bee—and I know, Chair, that the rest of these questions can be put on notice—does the department have a view on what parts of the Asian honey bee management program require improvement or additional resources?

Dr Grant: The Asian honey bee program moved some time ago, about three years ago, from eradication to transition into management. An exercise of liaison between industry and all levels of government that were relevantly involved with that put together a transition of management plan which had a number of elements to it, and I have it here but—

Senator XENOPHON: Can you give details of that on notice?

Dr Grant: My understanding is: the plan is now in place and people are following the objectives of the plan, and I think the funding that was put together has largely come to an end. But we can take that on notice—

Senator XENOPHON: For the eradication or for the transition?

Dr Grant: For the transition. It is a transition exercise to put in place management processes to deal—

Senator XENOPHON: How many officers are needed to effectively manage the Asian honey bee?

Dr Grant: Not all of it is through government management efforts; it is partly with industry and partly with states and various other entities. But I will take that on notice and we will come back to you.

Answer:

Following the decision in 2011 that it was not technically feasible to eradicate Asian honey bee, a program was undertaken to assist industry and the community to transition from eradication to management. The Australian and Queensland governments provided a total of $2 million and $600,000, respectively, in 2011-12 and 2012-13 to fund the implementation of the Asian Honey Bee Transition to Management Plan. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and the Federal Council of Australian Apiarists Association contributed $200,000 each ($400,000 in total) through the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation to support complementary research. Industry also provided in-kind support.

The plan included six projects aimed at developing the ability of the community, commercial and hobby apiarists to identify Asian honey bee and apply control measures to limit its impact on honey production, human health and the environment.

Question: 9 (continued)

This program was one of three pilot programs (the others being for myrtle rust and branched broomrape) trialling a new approach to deal with incursions that cannot be eradicated but where coordinated action is needed. It is close to being finalised and has demonstrated successfully that transition from eradication towards management by the community is viable.

The Transition to Management Plan and related activities can be found at http://asianhoneybee.net.au.

SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Public Hearing Tuesday, 20 May 2014

Brisbane, QLD

Questions Taken on Notice – Food Standards Australia and New Zealand

1. HANSARD, PG 59

Senator XENOPHON: I have a few follow-up questions on standards. For instance, there are some chemicals that are banned here but used overseas. Imported honey products may contain those chemicals that are banned for use here in Australia. Does that mean that they would breach the standard or, because they are an import, would they be exempt from that standard?

Mr May: They will not be exempt from the standard. I will pass on the question about 'banning' because I do not think 'banned' is the correct term.

Senator XENOPHON: Europe did something, though, didn't they?

Mr May: No.

Senator XENOPHON: What did Europe do back at the end of 2013? Didn't they prohibit the use of—

Mr May: I think the issue is that the chemicals are not approved for use. I think that is what you are saying. There are chemicals that are approved for use in another country but are not approved for use in Australia and may turn up in a product. If they turn up in a product in Australia and there is no MRL for that chemical—and we are talking about agvet chemicals here—or no contaminant level for that chemical, then they will be in breach of the code.

Senator XENOPHON: But we do have a situation where some chemicals are not approved for use in Australia—and we go back to the citrus example with carbendazim. Are there any chemicals that are not approved for use in Australia that end up in honey imported from overseas but that are not prohibited under the food standards?

Mr May: I could not comment on whether particular chemicals fall into that category. There are certainly chemicals that have an MRL for food in Australia but do not have an MRL for agricultural use in Australia.

Senator XENOPHON: But, given that you have come here to an inquiry about honey and beekeeping, can you at least take on notice whether there are chemicals—in terms of food standards, your area of expertise—that are not approved in Australia but do end up in imports; they still do not breach the food standard but they would not be allowed for use here in Australia in terms of agricultural production.

Mr May: I can take that on notice.

2. HANSARD, PG 62

Senator XENOPHON: I want to go back to Mr May about how honey is defined in the Food Code. Some documents were tabled earlier for a brand called Hecham honey. It says on its ingredients panel 'Ingredients honey, fructose and glucose (added to prevent crystallisation)'. Could that be classified as honey or is that an exemption? It seems they have added fructose and glucose.

Mr May: There are no exemptions.

Senator XENOPHON: So they should not be calling themselves honey if they have got fructose and glucose.

Mr May: You cannot call a product honey and comply with the food law if it is not the honey that is produced—

Senator XENOPHON: So who gets this stuff off the shelves now? You guys cannot.

Mr May: [Indistinct] is the organisation you would need to go to.

Senator XENOPHON: So despite their reason 'added to prevent crystallisation' there is lots of 100 per cent Australian honey does not have any additives that does not seem to crystallise. To you, that would be in breach of the code.

Mr May: That would be a matter for the state and territory enforcement agencies.

Senator XENOPHON: Okay. But if you add fructose and glucose to honey you can no longer call the product honey under the code.

Mr May: Can I take that one on notice? There is a small list of foods that can be added to honey but you would still have to comply with the compositional requirement for reducing sugars.

Senator XENOPHON: If you could, that would be useful.

CHAIR: What about the fructose? You are not sure about that either?

Mr May: No, no. That is okay. It is within the question.

3. HANSARD, PG 67

Senator XENOPHON: Chair, I think that, in terms of the APVMA, there are a whole range of issues that we can put on notice because they are largely technical—

CHAIR: And for FSANZ.

Senator XENOPHON: And FSANZ. With FSANZ, if we could just get some clarity about what exemptions there are, whether corn syrup or fructose or glucose are exemptions or not and to what extent. Thank you.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Answers to Questions on Notice

Brisbane, 20 May 2014

Senator: Nick Xenophon

Type of Question: Hansard, page 59

Question:

Can you advise whether there are chemicals—in terms of food standards, your area of expertise—that are not approved in Australia but do end up in imports; they still do not breach the food standard, but they would not be allowed for use here in Australia in terms of agricultural production.

Answer:

There are no agricultural and veterinary chemicals that are permitted in honey for sale that are not also permitted to be used in Australian agriculture.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Answers to Questions on Notice

Brisbane, 20 May 2014

Senator: Nick Xenophon

Type of Question: Hansard, pages 61, 67

Question:

Can you add corn syrup or fructose or glucose to honey you can no longer call the product honey under the Code?

Answer:

There is no permission for added sugars in a food product sold as honey. The Code provides that only the food defined as honey can be sold with the prescribed name honey. A food that is a combination of honey and added sugars may be sold under another name, for example, sweetened honey.

SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

Public Hearing Tuesday, 20 May 2014

Brisbane, QLD

Questions Taken on Notice – Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

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1. HANSARD, PG 59

Senator XENOPHON: I have a few follow-up questions on standards. For instance, there are some chemicals that are banned here but used overseas. Imported honey products may contain those chemicals that are banned for use here in Australia. Does that mean that they would breach the standard or, because they are an import, would they be exempt from that standard?

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Inquiry into the future of beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Public Hearing 20 May 2104

Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

Question on Notice:

Division/Agency: Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority

Topic: Chemical control of bees

Proof Hansard page: 59

Senator Xenophon asked: There are some chemicals that are banned here but used overseas. Imported honey products may contain those chemicals that are banned for use here in Australia.

Answer:

Imported honey is tested by the Imported Food Division in the Department of Agriculture. Honey is tested for the following antibiotics/antibiotic classes: chloramphenicol, nitrofurans, streptomycin, sulphonamides and tetracyclines.

Of the antibiotics tested, only oxytetracycline is approved for use on bees and hives in Australia. Of the remaining chemicals, nitrofurans are not registered in Australia for any uses, as Australia prohibited the use of nitrofurans in 1992.