

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport

Re : The current Asian Bee Incursion

I, Chris Dawson, am a commercial Apiarist and manage my enterprise at Shelbourne, west of Bendigo. My wife and I employ one full time employee. We are honey harvesters and pollinators of commercial crops. We came to beekeeping as an occupation later in life and have now operated as apiarists for eleven years. It is our prime means of support and a source of pleasure to be involved in this industry. In a recent interview on the ABC, I volunteered that I have not been to work for any of those 11 years; to which John Faine (the presenter) responded, "Find the occupation you enjoy and you need never work again". This Asian bee incursion and subsequent decision to declare the bee endemic will most certainly place that state of affairs at risk.

I ask members of this committee to recommend in the final report that every resource available be utilised to remove this incursion of Asian Bees.

I have heard the remarks of both Dr Anderson and Dr. Whitten and to my mind, it is very frightening evidence. This country cannot leave a legacy of failing to at least make a genuine effort to eradicate Apis Cerana. Trevor Weatherhead, the beekeeper on the ground and man most intimately connected to the efforts to contain this menace is of the opinion: - Apis Cerana **can** be removed from Australia. While we have people prepared to make the effort to eradicate this pest, support must be offered in every practical way.

Dr Anderson has made the observation that in countries where beekeeping is practiced using Apis Mellifera, and where A. Cerana and many other problems are present, the greatest threat to the industry is A. Cerana. Asian bees make it very difficult to maintain the managed European Bees. Here in this country we have an increasing number of impediments to the apiary industry, many more than when I first had exposure to the keeping of bees as a teenager. Since that time Chalk brood, European Foulbrood, sac brood and just recently Small Hive Beetle have become endemic. The latest has gained a hold in this country without so much as a whimper of an attempt to remove it. Small hive beetle is forcing dramatic changes to management, all of which detract from the pleasure of keeping bees and all come at a cost.

A. Cerana is a host of Varroa mite and may be the means whereby Varroa gains entry to this country. Fortunately this current incursion did not bring with it Varroa. If the Asian Bee is endemic to Australia, how will it be possible to detect a new incursion of Asian bees, which could bring with it the dreaded Varroa? Australia is the only Bee keeping country in the world free of Varroa. This Committee will no doubt be versed in the dangers of Varroa.

America understands the grave threat posed by the possible introduction of the Asian bee to American shores. America has banned the import of Australian bees despite their grave shortage of A. Mellifera. The reason behind this decision is our government has declared the Asian bee cannot be eradicated and is endemic - a declaration made far too early and based on dubious evidence. America knows that

the incursion of A. Cerana to our shores is confined to the area surrounding Cairns. The bees they sourced from our country come from areas highly removed from Cairns however the very thought of any chance of importing A. Cerana has spooked the Americans into cancelling all imports. Despite the urgent need for imports of our bees the Americans have opted on the side of caution? Canada and other countries will no doubt follow suit. Australia still has the opportunity to eradicate this menace. Australia **must grasp** the chance.

The impact of A. Cerana on the amenity of life in this country cannot be overlooked when considering evidence to decide if eradication should proceed. The habits and tenacity of this import will, if allowed to become endemic, threaten much of our fauna and make our homes and cities less liveable. The incursion will result in depleted feral pollination and drive our future inhabitants to question why this problem was allowed to establish. The swarming tendency of this bee combined with its fondness for domestic dwellings and a desire to reside in small cavities will see it inhabit the most inconvenient locations. Letterboxes, eaves, cracks in walls and places close to human occupation will become its target. Aggressive by nature it will be a difficult neighbour. Small fauna will be driven from their abodes and this will result in a grave threat to their future. The propensity of this bee to form small colonies makes it a lot less effective as a pollinator. Lacking the ability to form large colonies with big worker populations make this rogue bee ineffectual for large-scale pollination. Where it is now established, there is evidence Asian bees are driving European bees out. This removes one of the most effective pollinators from working. European Bees are easily hived, form large populations and are readily transported. They produce quantities of honey beyond their immediate requirements. This makes them ideal for large-scale pollination of Monoculture crops. When not engaged in pollination they can very successfully be encouraged to produce honey making them a very versatile tool in the arsenal of the modern food producer.

Is future food security the most pressing, immediate and dangerous threat to future wellbeing of the human race? Food security is very close to becoming critical and for many already an overwhelming problem. To allow any threat to the security of Australia's food supply to become established when it could be eliminated is nothing short of criminal.

I cannot estimate the cost to Australia of allowing this pest to become endemic. That is a subject requiring hours of research to arrive at any sort of an authoritative figure. What I can say is the cost will be immense and far beyond any immediate guess. The cost will take many forms, some of which may be immeasurable. The environment will never be the same right across Australia, the change definitely not of benefit. Biodiversity within that landscape will decrease.

Living conditions for all Australians will take a severe hit. People will become annoyed and frustrated by this rogue bee. The incidence of stings to the public will increase, along with the subsequent hospitalisation of victims who develop an allergic reaction. Increased pressure on our health system is not required nor sought.

Personally my plans for the future will be severely disrupted, with the increasing work required to manage this incursion resulting in my failing back requiring support available for aged people much earlier than planned and would prompt me to leave

the industry a lot earlier than would otherwise be the case. I am a taxpayer earning my bit and contributing my bit. To maintain bee strength and numbers now requires constant effort. I am now experiencing for the first time just how difficult beekeeping practice is becoming due to Small Hive Beetle. I dread to think of the burden Asian bees will bring.

I know Asian bees or varroa mite will see me exit the industry. What I must now decide is do I leave early and obtain value for the business? Or do I wait until it is too late and be left with an asset that may be worthless? A serious attempt to eradicate this incursion would see me continue on as an apiarist for many years.

To relinquish beekeeping would be a tragic loss. My heart and soul has been poured into my bees. I have invested financially and physically in a manner to enable me, no longer a young man, to continue well into the future. I have no desire to retire which is perhaps the only option. I watched my father, who retired from the pursuit he loved, live out the last of his days a disillusioned man. He did not live for long, it only seemed like it.

Chris Dawson