
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

More Than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries

**Report of the inquiry into the future development of the
Australian honey bee industry**

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources**

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Canberra

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Contents

Foreword	vii
Membership of the Committee	ix
42nd Parliament	ix
41st Parliament	ix
Terms of reference	xi
List of abbreviations	xiii
List of recommendations	xvii
1 Current and future prospects	1
Current state of the industry	2
Threats and opportunities	8
The Linkages Workshop.....	15
Pollination Australia	19
Committee conclusions.....	25
2 Bees in Agriculture	27
Agricultural chemicals.....	32
Alternative pollinators	39
Genetically modified (GM) crops	43
Committee conclusions.....	45
3 Resource security	47
Access to public lands	48
Land management	55
Plantations.....	63
Environmental impact of the honey bee industry	64

	Bushfires	76
	Committee conclusions.....	80
4	Biosecurity.....	83
	Exotic threats	83
	Meeting the threat	90
	National Sentinel Hive Program	103
	Quarantine	109
	Drone semen.....	113
	Endemic threats	115
	Borders	120
	Committee conclusions.....	122
5	Economic and trade issues.....	129
	Economic viability of the industry.....	129
	Market fragmentation	135
	Bee industry workforce.....	137
	Marketing	140
	Industry organisation.....	144
	Imports and standards	146
	Exports.....	152
	Committee conclusions.....	158
6	Research, extension and training.....	163
	Current research priorities and funding.....	163
	Future research funding	165
	Future research priorities.....	170
	Education and training	180
	Formal training	186
	Extension	192
	National research and training centre.....	193
	Committee conclusions.....	199
	Appendix A – Honeybee R&D Five Year Plan 2007–2012.....	203

Appendix B – The Inquiry	211
Appendix C – List of submissions.....	213
Appendix D – List of exhibits	217
Appendix E – List of public hearings and witnesses	221



Foreword

The humble honey bee is one of the most important contributors to the success of Australian agriculture. Many crop and pasture species are heavily or totally reliant on bees for pollination. Commercial prosperity within the agricultural sector requires bees. So does the food security of Australian and the world.

Yet, the Australian honey bee industry faces a number of significant threats and challenges. A major challenge is resource security. The honey bee industry is dependent upon native forest for honey production and recovery from pollination operations. As native forests are locked away in National Parks, so the floral resources available to the industry have declined and will continue to decline. Bushfires and land clearing also have a significant impact on the availability of floral resources. Without access to floral resources, the potential of the honey bee industry to grow to meet the demands for crop pollination is compromised. The Committee has made a number of recommendations which, if implemented, will provide resource security for the honey bee industry and pollination dependent industries into the future.

This is especially important in the face of the biosecurity threats facing the industry, which have the potential to remove the pollination services provided by feral honey bees from the production cycle, making agricultural industries largely or wholly dependent upon managed bees. The potential for pests such as *Varroa destructor* to annihilate feral bee populations and decimate managed bees is real. Keeping such pests and diseases from Australian shores should be a priority for governments and industry. Investment in border security measures and research is vital. In this regard, Australia needs to lift its game. In particular, the Committee strongly recommends the creation of a new honey bee quarantine facility and increased funding for the National Sentinel Hive Program.

The industry is also being challenged by declining profitability in the honey production sector and the problems associated with modernising an industry

based on honey production to provide paid pollination services. Yet, for paid pollination services to be viable the honey production sector must also be viable. Import competition is having a significant impact upon returns to Australian producers – but much of this competition derives from low cost countries with poor quality control regimes. Australian exporters on the other hand often face a range of tariff and non-tariff barriers in accessing overseas markets. Clearly, there is no level playing field. In addition, lax labelling laws have allowed foreign honey to be ‘re-badged’, with serious implications for the reputation of Australian honey. These are issues which must be addressed.

Protecting the industry from biosecurity threats and preparing it for the future is a significant undertaking. In this vein, the Committee acknowledges the work of government and industry in creating Pollination Australia, an organisation designed to provide funding and leadership for Australia’s pollination providers and pollination users into the future. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that there is greater scope still for the promotion of research extension and training for the Australian honey bee industry and related industries. With this in view, the Committee has recommended that the Australian Government commit \$50 million per annum in pursuit of biosecurity measures and research in support of the Australian honey bee industry and pollination dependent industries; and that the Australian Government use this money to establish a national centre for honey bee and pollination industry research, training and extension.

My colleagues and I would like to thank all those who made contributions to the inquiry. The honey bee industry is made up of people with a real dedication to their craft, a genuine love for what they do, a fact reflected in the quantity and quality of evidence provided to the Committee. I would also like to thank the members of the former Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for their contribution to the inquiry and what has been obtained through that work.

The Hon Dick Adams MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

42nd Parliament

Chair The Hon Dick Adams MP

Deputy Chair Mr Alby Schultz MP

Members	Mr James Bidgood MP	Ms Kirsten Livermore MP
	Mr Nick Champion MP	Mr Graham Perrett MP
	Mr John Forrest MP	Mr Sid Sidebottom MP
	Mr Barry Haase MP	Mr Tony Windsor MP

41st Parliament

Chair Mr Alby Schultz MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Dick Adams MP

Members	Mr Martin Ferguson MP	Mr Gavan O'Connor MP
	Mr Michael Ferguson MP	Mr Patrick Secker MP
	Mr John Forrest MP	The Hon Wilson Tuckey MP
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Terms of reference

This inquiry will examine the honey bee industry in terms of:

1. Its current and future prospects.
2. Its role in agriculture and forestry.
3. Biosecurity issues.
4. Trade issues.
5. The impact of land management and bushfires.
6. The research and development needs of the industry.
7. Existing industry and Government work that has been undertaken for the honey bee industry.



List of abbreviations

ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
AFB	American Foulbrood
AHA	Animal Health Australia
AHBIC	Australian Honey Bee Industry Council
AHGA	Australian Hydroponic and Greenhouse Association
APVMA	Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority
AQBBA	Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association
AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
BMP	best management practices
CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia
CCD	Colony Collapse Disorder
CIE	Centre for International Economics
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

CVAA	Central Victorian Apiarists Association
CVO	Chief Veterinary Officer
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation, Western Australia
DPI	Department of Primary Industries, Victoria/NSW
DPIW	Department of Primary Industries and Water, Tasmania
EADRA	Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement
EFB	European Foulbrood
EMAI	Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute
EMS	Environmental Management System
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency, Queensland
EPPRD	Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed
EU	European Union
FCAAA	Federal Council of Australian Apiarists' Associations
FFIC	Forests and Forest Industries Council of Tasmania
GM	genetically modified
GMO	genetically modified organism
GVP	gross volume of production
IPP	Industry Partnerships Program
IRA	Import Risk Analysis
MRL	Minimum Residue Level
NAQS	Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy

NCC	National Code of Conduct
NEVAA	North East Victoria Apiarists Association
NRS	National Residue Survey
NSHP	National Sentinel Hive Program
OTC	Oxytetracycline
PA	Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PDB	paradichlorobenzene
PHA	Plant Health Australia
PIAPH	Product Integrity Animal and Plant Health Division, DAFF
QA	quality assurance
QBA	Queensland Beekeepers' Association
QPDI	Queensland Department of Primary Industries
R&D	research and development
RFA	Regional Forest Agreement
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SEQFA	South East Queensland Forests Agreement
SHB	Small Hive Beetle
TBA	Tasmanian Beekeepers' Association
TCPA	Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association
UWS	University of Western Sydney
VAA	Victorian Apiarists' Association
WABA	Western Australian Beekeeper's Association



List of recommendations

1 Current and future prospects

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide the necessary leadership, funding and organisational resources to establish and run Pollination Australia.

2 Bees in Agriculture

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research and training in the provision of paid pollination services as part of its contribution to Pollination Australia.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into alternative pollinators as part of its contribution to Pollination Australia.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government alter labelling requirements for agricultural chemicals to reflect their impact on honey bees and other pollinating insects.

3 Resource security

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, establish guidelines for beekeeper access to public lands and leasehold lands, including national parks, with a view to securing the floral resources of the Australian honey bee industry and pollination dependent industries.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide incentives for the planting and conservation of melliferous flora under Commonwealth funded revegetation projects and carbon credit schemes.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government fund research into the impact of fire management on the Australian honey bee industry with a view to establishing honey bee industry friendly fire management practices.

4 Biosecurity

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the Australian Government maintain and enhance the National Sentinel Hive Program with a view to ensuring that:

- all major ports are covered by sentinel and bait hives;
- all beekeepers are brought under the program, with priority given to those operating in the vicinity of port facilities;
- arrangements are made for an effective program of pre-border security; and
- government provides funding adequate to achieving the above objectives.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry request that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority fast track the pre-registration of pesticides and other chemicals necessary to combat a Varroa incursion.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Australian Government improve the nation's incursion response capacity by providing for:

- Better education of those charged with border protection;
- Improved diagnostic capacity for pests and diseases;
- The establishment of national diagnostic protocols;
- The establishment of a national integrated pest and disease management protocol; and
- The establishment of a comprehensive biosecurity research program for the honey bee and pollination dependent industries.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry establish a new honey bee quarantine facility as a matter of urgency, this facility to be commissioned prior to the closure of the current facility at Eastern Creek, and that:

- This facility is integrated into a national honey bee and pollination research centre;
- This facility have a containment laboratory for research on honeybee genomics and biotechnology;
- The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry enter into immediate negotiations with his New South Wales counterpart to establish the new honey bee quarantine facility at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, Camden, or some other suitable location.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry direct Biosecurity Australia to complete the import risk analysis for drone semen by the end of 2008.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, establish and fund a national endemic bee pest and diseases control program.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, establish bee biosecurity regions based on natural boundaries, being:

- Eastern Australia, including New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and South Australia;
- Tasmania;
- Western Australia;
- Northern Territory; and
- Kangaroo Island.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, establish a national system of registration for beekeepers, bee hives and apiary sites.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commit \$50 million per annum in pursuit of biosecurity measures and research in support of the Australian honey bee industry and pollination dependent industries.

5 Economic and trade issues**Recommendation 17**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to investigate pricing practices for honey within the honey bee industry and the retail sector.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Productivity Commission investigate the long term viability of the Australian honey bee industry in respect of industry organisation, marketing structures and the financial viability of producers and packers.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship look at the skilled migration program with a view to further refining opportunities for the honey bee industry and the emerging pollination industry.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop product standards for honey and other bee products with regard to food standards and chemical contamination in line with those in force in the European Union, and that all imported honey products are tested against this standard.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop labelling standards to more accurately reflect the place of origin and composition of honey and honey bee products.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue the development of a uniform international standard for the testing and labelling of honey bee products and the removal of all tariffs on honey bee products.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with industry, reduce inspection charges, if possible, for queen and packaged bees to make the export of this product more cost effective to producers.

6 Research, extension and training**Recommendation 24**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national centre for honey bee and pollination industry research, training and extension, funded as per Recommendation 16.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government alter research funding arrangements to allow for:

- voluntary contributions to research funding to be matched by government funding; and
- a levy on pollination services to be allowed under law.

