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Submission To The New Inquiry

The Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry

IT'S CURRENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Current and Future prospects in QLD are unstable due to the fact that our Crown Land Resources mainly State Forests are being handed over to National Parks. Beekeepers will be locked out in 2024 and because of this our business will have to seriously look at its ongoing viability in regard to future investment.

To give some background into our business, it is a family owned partnership run by my wife and myself. Our 22yr old son has been employed full time with us since 2001, along with casual labour when needed. We operate 1000 beehives shifting them to areas within a radius 1000 klms of Toowoomba QLD.

80 to 90% of our resources for nectar and pollen would come from Crown Land.

The main reason for this is the fact that a major part of our freehold resources has been lost due to land clearing.

IT'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

There needs to be more education right across rural industries on the importance bees play in pollination of the many different crops grown. Current research coming out of New Zealand and other countries where varroa mites have wiped out feral populations of bees (eg wild hives in trees); show that pastures, fruit and cereal crops are no longer yielding unless paid pollination is put in place. The positives of bees in forestry are that most apiary sites in state forests are on old logging ramps. By beekeepers using these sites they keep tracks from being overgrown and the apiary sites provide a clear and safe area for firefighters to turn around or park during emergencies such as bush fires. Beekeepers also tell rangers when they spot unusual things going on, and are able to keep a lookout for weeds such as giant rats tail grass, parthenium and other unwanted weeds.

BIOSECURITY ISSUES

The biggest threat to the Australian Honey Bee Industry is Varroa Mite.

Not enough is being done Australia wide to prevent this parasite from entering our country.

Currently in Queensland there are 80 sticky mat surveillance hives in place. I believe this still to be inadequate, however compared to other Australian states Queensland leads the way with surveillance. We can never be too vigilante as has been proved in the past, (eg chalk brood 1993, small hive beetle 2002) these are two things we could have done without. Another threat is the Asian Honey Bee (apis cerana) this bee is a carrier of varroa mites and also competes

vigorously for nectar supplies. It has come to the forefront again in recent weeks with it being detected in Cairns Nth Queensland. I stress again more needs to be done both by Governments and Industry to prevent these pests from entering Australia.

TRADE ISSUES

If beekeeping is locked out of future national parks (eg 2024) production of honey will decrease dramatically thus affecting the supply of honey to packers and a flow on effect would be the loss of exports and loss of jobs due to the lack of honey to pack and sell.

THE IMPACT OF LAND MANAGEMENT AND BUSH FIRES

Our forests in Queensland need to be managed better in regard to bush fires. Under the RFA and SEQFA forests are having the cattle removed from them and are being locked up. This will lead to disasters such as we have seen happen in southern states in recent years, due to increased fuel loads because of grazing cattle being removed and the lack of hazard reduction burning being carried out. Again this highlights the role beekeeping plays in our forest by keeping tracks open. The tracks can be used for firebreaks when needed and allows access for fire crews when emergencies arise .

THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF INDUSTRY

More money needs to be spent on research into better controls of varroa mites should they arrive in Australia.. There needs to be research also done in the following areas; detection of American foul brood, the control of Small hive beetle, and the effects dry seasons have on our natural pollen proteins. A national course needs to be developed and put in place to train people in practical beekeeping skills so that these people can go on and become researchers or DPI officers. Nationally we have very few young people coming up through the ranks who know anything about beekeeping .

Yours Sincerely
Rodney Ruge

Vice President
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