



# Monthly NEWS

To: The Australian Honey Industry

From: Stephen Ware – Executive Director

## February 2011 Update

AHBIC acknowledges the **beekeeper suppliers** who contribute via their packer/queen bee supplier to AHBIC. We urge beekeepers to support those Packers/Queen bee breeders who contribute to AHBIC.

**DOES YOUR HONEY BUYER(S) OR QUEENBEE SUPPLIER'S NAME APPEAR ON THIS LIST?  
IF NOT, THEN ASK 'WHY NOT?' AHBIC WORKS FOR YOU!**

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**Thank you to all our beekeeper contributors some of whom have asked to remain anonymous. AHBIC appreciates your ongoing support.**

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## UPDATE - AHBIC ACTIVITIES

The following provides an update of recent activities of AHBIC naturally if you should seek any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact the AHBIC office.

February has been a very busy month for Industry. AHBIC continues and is involved in the following matters:

1. The Asian Honey Bee incursion in Queensland - please find enclosed details and updates on this ongoing issue.
2. Following on from the Asian Honey Bee decision members would be aware the export of live honey bees to the United States was temporarily suspended on 28 October 2010.

Following this temporary suspension the United States announced through a Federal Import Order on 21 December 2010 that the export of live honey bees from Australia was prohibited. Although this was well before the 2 February 2011 announcement by the Asian Honeybee National Management Group (AHB NMG) that eradication of the *Apis cerana* incursion was no longer feasible, the United States indicated at the time of suspension that the incursion of Asian honey bees was of concern including its control.

At the time of suspension, the United States also expressed concerns that no work had been done to identify which viruses Asian honey bees carried and that unknown viruses could be transmitted from the Asian honey bees to managed *Apis mellifera* throughout Australia. The United States has also identified honey bee viruses that it considers to be present in Australia but that are not known to be present in the United States, in particular, slow paralysis virus. Biosecurity Services Group has provided available information to the United States on Australia's bee health status, however, this is limited and survey data are dated.

As a result the US has requested more information on the distribution of honey bee pests and viruses throughout Australia, particularly slow paralysis virus and information on the potential pathogens the Asian honey bees in the incursion may be carrying.

AHBIC continues to press the United States to allow the export of bees from Australia. One of the new strategies will be to contact directly the Almond Board of California to seek their assistance.

3. Industry would be aware of the proposed Beekeepers Rally on 2 March 2011 in Canberra. At the AHBIC Executive meeting on 18 February 2011, the Executive agreed in principle to support this campaign. We fully support this campaign and AHBIC representatives will be attending on 2 March.

For more information see website: [www.securefoodsavebees.com](http://www.securefoodsavebees.com)

4. If things couldn't get any worse! Myrtle Rust has become an issue and we continuing to monitor this.
5. Also attached to this newsletter is a memorandum re: the "Food Security Needs Bee Security Campaign".

## ASIAN BEE ERADICATION PROGRAM



The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) is concerned that the National Management Group (NMG) has decided that the Asian bee eradication program will no longer proceed as it deems that the Asian bee is not technically feasible to eradicate. This was a majority decision.

See the Communiqué at:

[http://www.daff.gov.au/about/mediacentre/communiqués/update\\_on\\_response\\_to\\_asian\\_honeybees](http://www.daff.gov.au/about/mediacentre/communiqués/update_on_response_to_asian_honeybees)

AHBIC continues to lobby to have the eradication program continue.

### ***Background***

- The Asian bee (*Apis cerana*) breached our border security and evaded the quarantine system to set up in Cairns. It was found in May 2007.
- A response was mounted and, after several months, it was thought that the Asian bee had been eradicated. However, in July 2009, another nest was found and the response was again put in place.
- In April 2010, a cost sharing scheme was put in place and this finished, in its intensive form, in November, 2010.
- In January 2011, the NMG decided that the eradication program would not continue. Some funding will be available till 31 March 2011.



The reasons for continuing the eradication program:

### ***The Asian bee***

- This is the Java strain of the Asian bee and is not like the strains of Asian bees in Thailand, China and Japan
- The Java strain cannot be kept in boxes, is aggressive, is not an effective honey producer, swarms prolifically and absconds at the slightest disturbance

### ***Effect on the beekeeper***

- The Asian bee has established in the Solomon Islands where the number of managed colonies of European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) (the ones we keep in Australia) dropped from 2,000 to five (5) in less than eight (8) years. This was because the Asian bee outcompetes the European honey bee.
- The Asian bee reduces the beekeepers ability to keep the European honey bee.
- This is the third major quarantine breach for the beekeeping industry in less than 20 years. The previous ones were chalkbrood and the small hive beetle. Currently the small hive beetle is costing beekeepers in Queensland over \$2 million a year.
- The Java strain of the Asian bee is the natural host for one of the Varroa mites *Varroa jacobsoni*. Previously this mite had not reproduced on the European honey bee but in recent times in Papua New Guinea, this mite has been able to reproduce on the European honey bee with disastrous effects. Although this current incursion does not have the Varroa mite on it, any future breaches of quarantine could carry the mite. If the Asian bee is not eradicated, then this mite will have a ready reservoir in which to multiply and then maybe start reproducing on the European honey bee. This would be disastrous for the beekeeper.

### ***Effect on the environment***

- The Asian bee will take over the nesting hollows of native fauna. It can occupy small spaces
- The Asian bee will compete with native fauna for nectar and pollen
- The cane toad and rabbits have become established in the Australian environment. We believe the Asian bee will be just as bad, if not worse, than the cane toad and rabbits.
- Modelling shows that the Asian bee could spread all the way down the east coast to Victoria

### ***Effect on the public***

- Industry commissioned a cost benefit analysis entitled '*Estimating the Potential Public Costs of the Asian Honey Bee Incursion*'  
See: <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/10-026>
- There have been at least six (6) nests of Asian bees found in letter boxes
- In the Solomon Islands, up to six (6) nests have been found in people's homes
- In the Cairns area, the Asian bee has been found in the walls of houses, backyard sheds, brick walls, compost bins, boats, at airports and the Cairns casino
- The Asian bee has already been found in a nesting box in an aviary where it took over and killed the young

### ***Effect on pollination of crops***

- In Australia, at least one in three mouthfuls of food we eat relies on honey bees
- If the Asian bee becomes established and outcompetes the European honey bee, then there will not be hives available for broad acre pollination of crops reliant on pollination by honey bees such as almonds, watermelons, rockmelons, honey dews, lucerne, canola seed production, sunflower seed production
- As the Asian bee cannot be kept in boxes, it is not available for broad acre pollination for crops

### **ASIAN HONEY BEE (*Apis cerana*)**

#### **Advice 87– 27 January 2011**

Finds for the previous fortnight were:

IP332 was a nest at Bungalow

IP333 was a nest at Portsmouth

IP334 was a swarm at Whitfield

IP335 was a nest at Gordonvale

IP336 was a nest at Goldsborough

IP337 was a nest at Gordonvale

Staffing, as reported last Advice, is still in place.

The dog and handler are almost at the stage of validation.

The question was asked as to whether small hive beetle has been found in nests of cerana. So far there has not but whether this is because SHB don't go in or because the numbers of SHB in the Cairns area are not high enough is uncertain.

Traps have been put out near the southern boundary of the RA and also in the Tablelands area around the most western detections of cerana.

The RAMS officer continues to visit transport companies and issue movement permits within the RA.

The Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) had a telephone hook-up on 25 January. The results of that meeting will be presented at the National Management Group (NMG) meeting on 31 January. From there we should know where the eradication program is going.

#### **Advice 88– 3 February 2011**

The news we did not want to hear has come out.

The National Management Group (NMG) met on Monday this week and a Communiqué has been released which says in part “The Asian Honeybee National Management Group (AHB NMG) met on 31 January 2011 to consider advice provided by the Consultative Committee on Emergency

Plant Pests on the Asian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) incursion in North Queensland on whether it continued to be technically feasible or not to eradicate the Asian honeybee. The AHB NMG view

is that it is no longer technically feasible to achieve eradication although consensus was not reached.”

Why? “The AHB NMG’s decision, that it is no longer technically feasible to eradicate Asian honeybees, is based on a number of factors including:

- the tendency for the bees to swarm;
- the bee breeds rapidly and can travel long distances, particularly with assisted movement on vehicles and trains; and
- limitations of current surveillance methods which makes it difficult to locate all nests and destroy them.”

Notice there is no mention of the effects on the environment or the public. I would have thought the above reasons given make it crucial to try to eradicate the Asian bee, not put out the welcome mat. There is only one chance to eradicate this pest and it is my opinion that the program should continue whilst there is a chance of it succeeding. If you are in Queensland then you know what the effect of cane toads is. In the south you know the problems caused by rabbits. In my opinion, the Asian bee will be worse than either of these. From my point of view I do not want to be judged by future generations who, when trying to cope with the Asian bee menace, say why did they not take the extra steps and effort to ensure this pest did not become established in mainland Australia.

The Communiqué further says “The AHB NMG agreed to recommend continued funding for residual activities being carried out under the current program until 31 March 2011. It was also agreed that a group of Senior Biosecurity Officials should meet to determine whether any further national action is warranted.”

The fight is now on to have this program continue. In my opinion, this decision is very short sighted and there is a bit of “not in my backyard” that seems to have come to the fore. AHBIC has released some information on what is happening. This has been circulated to all States so contact your State Secretary for a copy.

Notice there is no mention of the reason why the Asian bee is here. It is because there was a breach of our border security and a failure on the part of the quarantine inspection service. Now they want to walk away and leave us with the problem. This is the third serious quarantine breach in the past 20 years that has affected our industry. If we judge what will happen now by the response in the previous two, it will amount to zilch.

Stay tuned for further action.

P.S. I have been in contact with a couple of beekeepers in the north to see how they fared in the cyclone. Cairns and the Atherton Tableland seem to have been spared and the beekeepers report minimal damage. There are no commercial beekeepers in the Tully area, where it crossed the coast, but there are several part time beekeepers and I expect that they will have lost hives.

### **Advice 89– 19 February 2011**

Detections since Advice 87 are:

IP338 was a nest at Forest Garden  
IP339 was a nest at White Rock  
IP340 was a nest at Portsmouth  
IP341 was a swarm at Whitfield  
IP342 was a swarm at Stratford  
IP343 was a nest at Cairns North  
IP344 was a nest at Stratford  
IP345 was a swarm at Mooroolooloo  
IP346 was a swarm at Earlville  
IP347 was a nest at Trinity Park  
IP348 was a swarm at North Cairns  
IP349 was a swarm at Edmonton  
IP350 was a nest at Bentley Park  
IP351 was a nest at Bentley Park  
IP352 was a swarm at Parramatta Park

The first trial using remote poisoning has been carried out and a second one is planned.

The industry continues to lobby to have the decision to declare the Asian bee endemic reversed. This is in the best interest of the whole of Australia from a beekeeping point of view, the environment and the public. Have a look at: [www.securefoodssavebees.com](http://www.securefoodssavebees.com)

***Trevor Weatherhead***

## **UPDATE ON RESPONSE TO ASIAN HONEYBEES**

The Asian Honeybee National Management Group (AHB NMG) met on 31 January 2011 to consider advice provided by the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests on the Asian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) incursion in North Queensland on whether it continued to be technically feasible or not to eradicate the Asian honeybee. The AHB NMG view is that it is no longer technically feasible to achieve eradication although consensus was not reached.

The Asian honeybee [insert link here to [http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790\\_13530.htm](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_13530.htm)] is an invasive species which adversely impacts populations of European honeybees by competing for floral resources, robbing managed hives and transmitting disease. It is a natural host for Varroa mite *jacobsonii* - a parasite that attacks developing bee larvae or adult bees.

Following the first detection of an Asian honeybee nest near Cairns in May 2007, a nationally cost-shared program aimed at eradication was implemented, led by the Queensland Government and overseen by the AHB NMG. Since that time, over 342 swarms or nests have been found and destroyed. None of the nests destroyed to date have carried any exotic mites of concern such as Varroa, Tropiclaelaps or tracheal.

Activities to eradicate Asian honeybees in the Cairns region have been funded by the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments and the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) on behalf of its members at a cost of approximately \$3 million. Other industries reliant on bees and bee pollination services were approached at peak representative level to be involved in the management of the response but declined to contribute resources.

The AHB NMG's decision, that it is no longer technically feasible to eradicate Asian honeybees, is based on a number of factors including:

- the tendency for the bees to swarm;
- the bee breeds rapidly and can travel long distances, particularly with assisted movement on vehicles and trains; and
- limitations of current surveillance methods which makes it difficult to locate all nests and destroy them.

The AHB NMG agreed to recommend continued funding for residual activities being carried out under the current program until 31 March 2011. It was also agreed that a group of Senior Biosecurity Officials should meet to determine whether any further national action is warranted.

The AHB NMG expressed its appreciation to the beekeepers of Cairns and districts and the Queensland Government staff for their hard work and perseverance in attempting to eradicate the pest.

The AHB NMG is comprised of the chief executive officers of the national and state/territory departments of agriculture and primary industries across Australia, representatives of AHBIC, Plant Health Australia and is chaired by the Commonwealth.

Further advice on Asian honeybees and response actions to date can be found on Biosecurity Queensland's website. [http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790\\_13530.htm](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_13530.htm)

## **PLANT HEALTH AUSTRALIA - 2010 Year in Review**

After holding so much promise, the situation for agriculture appears to have deteriorated in parts of the country yet again. In the west it is dry weather sending hair grey, while over in the east rain and flooding have wreaked havoc.

While there have been many suspected exotic plant pests over the year requiring further investigation, a number of prominent incursions have seriously tested the national emergency response arrangements and the management capabilities of affected jurisdictions. Chief among these are the formal responses being mounted under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) for Myrtle rust (affecting areas of New South Wales) and Chestnut blight (affecting north-east Victoria where over 80% of Australia's chestnuts are produced). Of great concern to bee keepers is the incursion of Asian honey bees in North Queensland and the heightened risk this poses for establishment and spread of the potentially catastrophic exotic pest Varroa mite.

As the Asian honey bee was not recognised as an emergency animal disease under the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement and the incident occurred before bee pests were picked up under the EPPRD, the response could not be managed under the Deed. The national response, however, is being guided by principles contained in the EPPRD and the generic technical response plan – PLANTPLAN. Plant Health Australia (PHA) is custodian of the EPPRD and PLANTPLAN on behalf of the honey bee industry as well as the other 36 industry and government signatories. Additionally, PHA has supported the honey bee industry by contributing to decision making and management groups directing responses to these various incursions, as well as assisting with some operational response roles.

The [EPPRD](#) remains central to the services provided by PHA to Members. Over the year there were a number of significant developments which included honey bee pests gaining coverage

under the Deed, in recognition of the potential impact on pollination-reliant industries. Importantly, initial work was also undertaken in preparation for the prescribed five year review of the EPPRD.

Over the past 12 months, governments have been digesting the Beale Review and putting the building blocks in place to respond to its 84 recommendations. There is still some way to travel but it would be fair to say that governments, in principle, are committing to a range of new agreements and arrangements. This should see closer cooperation and a genuine move to national coordination across the biosecurity continuum, across jurisdictions, across agriculture sectors and across the government-industry divide.

On behalf of all company stakeholders, PHA played a role in supporting governments formulate plans to reform the national biosecurity system. Through our involvement on key government committees we have contributed ideas about priorities for the plant health system and emphasised at every turn the need for governments to embrace a partnership approach. It is crucial that while governments adopt more holistic attitudes to biosecurity, hard fought gains in national coordination for the plant sector, such as those operating under the [Deed](#), are not lost.

Requirements to share funding of incursion responses are formalised in the EPPRD as shared responsibilities. A number of our Members have been working to ensure that they have the capacity to meet this obligation, with the honey bee industry joining 16 other industries with a levy in place. To date, the honey bee and grains industries are the only two industries to preemptively set their levy at a positive rate. This has provided them the opportunity to fund a range of risk mitigation, market access and response preparedness activities, as well as to meet costs of engaging with PHA.

EPPRD training is a regular feature on the PHA calendar, and last year brought the total number of personnel trained by PHA to nearly 650. Late in the year, PHA launched its *Biosecurity OnLine Training (BOLT)* tool. Government and industry personnel who complete *BOLT* will learn the essentials surrounding the way Australia's biosecurity system operates and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

PHA's work on the [National Plant Biosecurity Strategy](#) will help stakeholders keep this focus on national coordination. The strategy represents the collective vision for protecting Australia and the livelihoods and lifestyles of Australians from the negative impacts associated with plant pest incursions. All Members of PHA have now endorsed the [National Plant Biosecurity Strategy](#), with a launch expected early in the New Year. The next steps will involve fleshing out potential roles and responsibilities and a timetable for action as part of an Implementation Plan.

Important milestones were met last year on the way to establishing a viable, cost effective and sustainable approach to fruit fly management. Not least among these was the release of a draft Action Plan developed by PHA under the guidance of the [National Fruit Fly Strategy](#) Implementation Committee. This important work was underpinned by the first ever national Fruit Fly Diagnostic Standard, the development of which was led by PHA with financial support from the Australian Government.

The second edition of the [National Plant Health Status Report](#) received an overwhelmingly positive response when it was launched at the Global Biosecurity 2010 Conference in Brisbane in February.

The support given by PHA to the Global Biosecurity Conference was just one example of how PHA contributed to the activities of the [Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant](#)

Biosecurity (CRCNPB) over the year. Contributions were also made through involvement on the Participants Committee and via numerous projects, including the Science Exchange, Grains Knowledge Network, and assistance with the bid for a new Plant Biosecurity CRC.

All the hard work to establish an Australian Biosecurity Intelligence Network (ABIN) culminated in March with the official launch of the initiative by the Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry, the Hon Richard Marles MP. Shortly after, PHA signed over host agency responsibilities for ABIN to CSIRO, thereby making it easier for ABIN to link into IT infrastructure connecting researchers and other biosecurity practitioners around the country. PHA remains involved in two fruit fly proof of concept projects which, in turn are supporting objectives of the *National Fruit Fly Strategy*.

Last year, PHA finalised contingency plans for 13 high priority pests. These plans contain critical pest information in the event of incursion, can streamline initial assessment of the incident and potentially enhance decision making. The task involves extensive consultation across industry, researchers and governments, and PHA would like to acknowledge the contributions of all the stakeholders involved.

Industry Biosecurity Plans (IBPs) are key components of the plant health system, underpinning the EPPRD. IBPs were reviewed for six of our Industry Members and new IBPs for several others. Work is in train on IBP reviews for a further 11 industries.

While IBPs are developed for peak industry decision making, PHA has also produced a range of materials and manuals to assist growers implement biosecurity measures on their property. Over the last twelve months, these have included *Farm Biosecurity Manuals* for a host of industries. A further eight manuals are currently being developed and will be released over the course of 2011.

Since July 2009, the Farm Biosecurity program, run in partnership with Animal Health Australia, has continued to prove successful in its aim of raising growers' awareness of biosecurity issues. This has been achieved through the [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au) website, the roll out of messages through rural media and newsletters and a successful Australian Biosecurity Farmer of the Year Award. The survey of producers conducted during the year has provided a baseline of information by which to assess the impact of future work. The survey sample included honey bee producers.

PHA's biennial Member and Stakeholder Survey provided some very positive feedback regarding our direction and performance. For instance, 88% of respondents rated PHA's overall performance as "Good" or "Excellent" (up from 81% in 2007). Furthermore, the vast majority (90%) of Members indicated that a positive relationship exists between their organisation and PHA (up from 78%). The survey also highlighted the need to continue to raise the bar to meet Members' needs and increased expectations.

To aid Member participation at company events, PHA took it's consultation on the draft *2010/2011 Annual Operational Plan* on the road, holding well attended meetings in Canberra, Mildura and Brisbane. Next year PHA will continue to explore options for maximising Member involvement and minimising costs to the Members and the company while maintaining the high standards of business accountability for which PHA is known.

PHA's strong financial performance over the year meant that subscriptions could again be held steady in 2010/2011. There is a possibility that subscriptions could even be held for a sixth straight year depending upon expectations placed on PHA by Members. The results were achieved

in the main through efficient operations and increased special project funding. PHA's focus will continue to be first and foremost on delivering benefits and first rate support to Members. Honey bee producers as well as the broader community can count on PHA to continue building on our record of success.

## **MR EDUARD PLANKEN OAM**

*Mr Ed Planken from Wescobee was awarded an OAM in the Australia Day Honours list*



Ed related how he first became interested in the Honey Industry!

In the early 1980s Eduard Planken was running a health-food store when a burly biker walked in looking for something to help heal a burn on one of his legs.

"He had gone to doctors and had never been able to get it healed," Mr Planken said.

"I had been reading an article about the healing properties of honey. I said,

'I could sell you lots of different things but I just read an article about honey and if you want I can give you a pot of honey, and just try it and see if it works'."

The biker returned a month later. The leg had healed.

Mr Planken credits the incident as being the deciding factor in him accepting a job as a sales representative with Wescobee Honey in 1983. He is now chief executive of the company.

Mr Planken has a reputation as a fierce advocate of the honey bee industry.

He has been a member of numerous boards and councils, and is deputy chair of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and was president of the International Honey Exporters Organisation between 1999 and 2009.

"I love the industry," he said.

He said receiving a Medal of the Order of Australia had "taken my breath away".

**CONGRATULATIONS ED, WELL DONE**

## **MYRTLE RUST CONFIRMED ON LEMON MYRTLE PLANTATIONS**

*Friday 28/01/2011*

The fungal disease myrtle rust has now spread to lemon myrtle plantations on the NSW North Coast.

These are the first incursions of the fungus on a crop since it was detected last April in a nursery on the state's Central Coast.

NSW Biosecurity's Bruce Christie says there have been several reports confirmed on lemon myrtle.

"What's happening is individuals are now saying they've become infected but there's certainly reports from a number of plantations and also bush areas and nurseries as well," he says.

"You'd expect where it's been it will continue to spread, it's not something that's going to contain itself to one or two leaves, it really depends."

Government authorities and industry are still are not entirely sure of the effects the myrtle rust can have on commercial crops such as tea tree, lemon myrtle or wildflowers.

He says it's a "look and learn" situation in Australia at the moment.

"We don't know in the Australian situation what this is going to do, in some cases it's going to vary depending on the plants and we've certainly seen examples where on some plants, some species, it doesn't seem to be having a major impact and others it's having more of any impact."

"It'll depend a little bit on the habitat, it'll depend on the aspect and which direction it's sitting, the humidity and it'll also depend on the stress levels the plants are under."

Dr Christie says it has been accepted nationally that myrtle rust can't be controlled through quarantine.

"The issue now is that it's been accepted that this is a disease which is going to become endemic and what we need to look at from now on is how we might be able control and manage it," he says.

"With an organism like a fungus which throws the spore up into the air and can get blown by wind or carried by clothing or equipment it is very difficult to control."

"There are a number of projects that will be looking into the future as to how to put in place methods so that individual properties can reduce the likelihood of being infected."

There are also a number of trials about to commence testing what fungicides are best to use in different situations.

Mr Christie says that at this stage the tea tree industry remains unaffected by myrtle rust.

"We haven't had any reports from any tea tree plantations but given that tea tree are from a Myrtaceae family it's highly likely that that may occur in the near future," he says.

There are standard biosecurity measures that property owners should be following to prevent myrtle rust from entering and infecting crops.

"Like making sure that not just anyone comes onto your property, making sure that people who have had contact with potentially infected plants don't come onto the property or they change their clothes."

The Exotic Plant Pest Hotline is 1800 084 881 or check the [Industry and Investment NSW](http://Industry and Investment NSW) website or if you have specific questions email: [biosecurity@industry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:biosecurity@industry.nsw.gov.au)

Myrtle rust is a notifiable pest and by law must be reported within 24 hours of discovering or become aware of its appearance.

**MYRTLE RUST**  
**NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION GROUP (MRNCG)**

*8 February 2011*

There was a telephone hook-up for the above group today. I represented AHBIC.

Basically I see my role as a watching brief to make sure that nothing is put in place that will be detrimental to our industry. One thing that could be put in place is movement restrictions. So far this has not come about and I would argue that flying foxes and the wind will carry the spores further than any bee may. Also I would suggest that after the bee processes the spores collected, they will be not viable. This is the same for pollen.

The outcome of the telephone hook-up was to discuss a series of strategies. The only one that will affect us is the communication one. We will be asked to put some links on our website. Also, I know from the Queensland experience, that beekeepers will also be asked to be on the lookout when they are out and about, particularly in forests, to see if they can spot any myrtle rust.

There was mention in the document of quarantine but so far there has been no move to stop movement of bee hives.

The MRNCG has to report to the NMG by 26 February. It is proposed that the MRNCG have another telephone hook-up before this.

*Trevor Weatherhead*



*The fungal disease myrtle rust on *Agonis flexuosa* (willow myrtle)*

*Dr Louise Morin, CSIRO.*

## **THE PLIGHT OF THE HONEY BEE**

*Food and Agribusiness News - 2/02/2011*

[www.rabobank.com](http://www.rabobank.com)

A new Rabobank report titled ‘The plight of the honey bee’ examines the importance of honey bee colonies to global agriculture. The steep decline in bee colonies since 2006 threatens production of crops from apples and almonds to cocoa, melons and soybeans. “Crop pollination by animals, particularly bees, currently supports around approximately a third of global food production” says Ruben Verwijs of Rabobank’s Food & Agribusiness Research and Advisory.” As demand for these crops grows, we have to find sustainable methods to maintain crop pollination by honey bees.”

### **Major losses for US and European beekeepers**

Since 2006 American beekeepers have been experiencing inexplicable losses of bees and considerable financial damage due to a phenomenon which has been labelled ‘colony collapse disorder’. Verwijs: “A loss rate of 10 per cent of a bee colony is considered normal. In the US, the rate of bee colonies not surviving the winter has been between 30 and 35 per cent, with the worst-hit beekeepers losing up to 90 per cent of their hives.” In the same period many European beekeepers have experienced losses of above 20 per cent. Inexplicable losses are also being witnessed in Asia, South America, and the Middle East.

### **Honey bee pollination crucial for agribusiness**

Animal pollinators play a crucial role in flowering plant reproduction and in the production of most fruits and vegetables. The act of pollination occurs when pollen grains are moved between two flowers of the same species by wind or animals. Ruben Verwijs: “Around 90 agricultural crops - representing one third of global food production volume - are dependent to some extent on animal pollination. Foods and beverages produced with the help of animal pollinators include almonds, apples, blueberries, coffee, melons and soybeans.”

The domesticated honey bee is by far the most significant of the several species of animal pollinators, accounting for between 80 to 90 percent of total animal pollination. Honey bees are also the most economically valuable pollinators of agricultural crops. US government research estimates the monetary value of honey bees as commercial pollinators at between USD 15-20 billion annually.

### **Rising demand for pollinated crops**

The sharp increase in honey bee colony losses has attracted attention from politicians, academics and the media, with some parties even claiming that mankind could vanish along with the honey bee. But Ruben Verwijs considers this highly unlikely. “Some of the major staple crops such as rice, wheat and corn do not require animal pollination. Besides, high losses to bee colonies are not entirely new. Early in the 20th century a disease wiped out nearly all the bees from the British Isles.”

But there is certainly cause for concern. Further declines in honey bee numbers around the world could cause a pollination shortage, which could impact the yields of crops like apples, pears and cocoa, which could in turn affect the price of pollination-dependent crops, at a time when demand is rising. Verwijs explains: “In emerging economies like China and Brazil, consumers can afford to move away from staple crops like corn, wheat and rice, which do not rely on animal pollination, to include more fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet. If honey bee colonies continue to decline

as demand for these crops rises, we could face a global issue with a considerable economic impact.”

### **Joint action for sustainable solutions**

In conclusion the Rabobank report calls for cooperation between the academic world, government bodies, beekeepers and companies directly dependent on animal pollination such as farmers and food processors. The Rabobank analyst gives a number of pointers to solutions, including more coordinated research and increasing biodiversity in agricultural production. Although there is still no clear explanation of the causes of the decline in honey bee colonies, for Verwijs one thing is perfectly clear: pollination can no longer be taken for granted as a production factor in the agri food chain.

### **RETIREMENT OF HEATHER CLAY**

Many beekeepers would know Heather Clay who was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Canadian Honey Council (CHC). Heather retired from that position from 31 December, 2010. Heather has been with the CHC for just over 12 years, firstly as the National Coordinator and then, when the CHC was restructured, she became the CEO for the past four (4) years. Heather had been very involved in overseeing the reorganization.

Many will remember Heather giving several presentations at the New South Wales Apiarists Association conference in Sydney in 2009. At that meeting Heather joked that CHC didn't stand for Canadian Honey Council but “Call Heather Clay”. Heather had been very instrumental in the reorganization of the CHC and she leaves it in very good shape with a strong board committed to maintaining the new direction, a surplus budget, new sponsors and a potential million dollar project in the final stage of approval. Heather was also the Editor of HiveLights, the official magazine of the Canadian Honey Council and she raised the standard of the magazine over the years.

I first met Heather at a CHC meeting in Edmonton in 1995. At that time Heather was the Provincial Apiculturist for New Brunswick, a position she held for 10 years before taking on the CHC job.

Heather was always approachable and was always willing to help Australian beekeepers while working for the benefit of the Canadian beekeepers.

Heather is an ex-Aussie having received her degree at Canberra University. She did some work in Australia before travelling to South Africa then on to Canada where she worked with the apiculture industry for 22 years. Heather was often back in Australia visiting her mother in Sydney and I expect we will see her more often now. She has daughters in Canada that will draw her back to Canada but Heather told me she will appreciate time in Australia especially during the Canadian winters.

I am sure that all Australian beekeepers will wish Heather the best in her retirement.

***Trevor Weatherhead***

## **MITE AWAY QUICK STRIPS™**

*Gets Section 3 Label*

The US beekeeping industry will welcome a versatile new product to the Varroa mite control tool box. Mite Away Quick Strips™ (MAQS™) was officially federally registered by EPA in the United States as of February 4, 2011, obtaining the Section 3 registration. The product will be gradually available over the next few months as production ramps up and pesticide registrations are obtained in each state.

MAQS™ is a formic acid gel strip product. Two strips are placed on the top bars in the brood area of the hive. The treatment period is seven days and can be used during the honey flow at temperatures up to 93 degrees F. No extra equipment is required. MAQS™ achieves up to 95% mite kill and penetrates the capping to destroy the male mite and immature female mites as well as the phoretic female mites on the adult bees.

For more information, visit the website at: [www.miteaway.com](http://www.miteaway.com)

### **2011 CONFERENCE DATES**

FCAAA	New South Wales Apiarists' Association	19 & 20 May 2011
	Tasmanian Beekeepers' Association	3 & 4 June 2011
	Victorian Apiarists' Association	8 & 9 June 2011
	WA Farmers Federation - Beekeeping Section	17 June 2011
	Queensland Beekeepers' Association	30 June & 1 July 2011
	South Australian Apiarists' Association	7 July 2011

Honey Packers and Marketers Association	TBA
National Council of Crop Pollination Associations	6 Jul 2011
Australian Queen Bee Breeders' Association	End of May
Australian Honey Bee Industry Council	8 July 2011
Federal Council of Australian Apiarists' Associations	6 July 2011

### **AHBIC 2011 AGM**

The 2011 Annual General Meeting of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council will be held in South Australia in conjunction with the South Australian Apiarists' Association Conference on Friday, 8 July 2011 at Rydges South Park, 1 South Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000

The South Australian Apiarists' Association (SAAA) has negotiated an accommodation package deal with Rydges South Park. The Secretary of SAAA, Mrs Wendy Thiele is responsible for all accommodation bookings – please contact Wendy on Phone: 08 8635 2257, Mobile: 0400 264 031 or Email: [secretary@saaa.org.au](mailto:secretary@saaa.org.au)