



AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL

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AUSTRALIAN HONEY INDUSTRY MONTHLY REVIEW

To: The Australian Honey Industry
From: Stephen Ware – Executive Director
Re: January 2009 Update

AB's Honey
Australian Honey Products
Beechworth Honey
Bees Neez Apiaries
Capilano Honey Limited
Dewar Apiaries
Honey DownUnder
H L & H M Hoskinson
I N & JE Mills

Pollination Association of WA
Saxonbee Enterprises
Spring Gully Goods Pty Ltd
Stephens, R
Tasmanian Crop Pollination Association
Tasmanian Honey Company
Walkabout Apiaries
Weerona Apiaries
Wescobee Limited

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

**Does your honey buyer's or queen bee supplier's name appear on this list?
If not, then ask 'why not?'**

SUPPORT THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOUR INDUSTRY!

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QUEENBEE ACCESS – UNITED STATES

We can confirm that the US will continue to accept our bees under the December 9 2008 certification requirements as previously advised. The United States of America (USA) has provided a revised health certificate to Australia to enable trade to continue, effective immediately, during the critical honeybee export season. The certificate has been amended to remove country freedom for *Apis cerana* and to require that:

Within two years prior to export to the United States, there has been no detection of Asian honeybees (*Apis cerana*) within a 100 mile (160 km) radius of the premises from which packaged and queen bees are derived, nor have the bees transited any regions affected with Asian honeybees en route to the port of embarkation.

Accordingly, honeybees can be exported to the USA provided they meet the conditions on the certificate. If you have any queries, please contact AQIS on (02) 6272 4581.

AHBIC was heavily involved in ensuring the continuation of the United States trade and I would also put on record industry thanks to Dr Penelope-Jane Linnett, A/g Principal Veterinary Officer, Non ruminant Zoo Section, Animal Biosecurity, Biosecurity Australia. It is unfortunate that members do not appreciate what industry does for them until something goes wrong. AHBIC is a representative body – ask yourself what you have contributed to the long term future of the industry. Individually, we may do well some of the time, but collectively and with a united front, we achieve so much more.

DULUX PAINT DEAL

We have struck a deal with Dulux to enable apiarists to obtain a significant commercial discount on paint purchased through Dulux. Details of the arrangement are as follows:

Members will be able to purchase a range of Dulux Paints from the network of Dulux Trade Stores (only) at TRADE prices by quoting the ONE Account Number namely **89965** together with their Beekeeper's Registration Number. If you don't have a registration number you can use your vehicle registration. Additionally, Dulux/AHBIC discount cards will be distributed shortly to industry members.

A full list of Dulux Trade Stores is attached. Please note the discount is only available at Dulux trade stores. This is a great discount for industry, but only if you use it!

APIS CERANA INCURSION

Well they are persistent but cannot get away from the surveillance teams. I was advised yesterday, 8 January, 2009, that foraging cerana had been found near IP18. I had decided not to issue an Advice as there was a scheduled phone hook-up for today so thought I would combine the two.

President Rodney and I participated in the phone hook-up today. The foraging bees are about 800 metres NWN from IP18. This makes it about 5km from Green Hill which was IP8&9 and about 4 km from IP10&13 near Walsh's Pyramid. They are now feeding on a sugar station but the wet weather may determine how quickly the bees can be beelined to find the nest.

There is the possibility of a cyclone forming in the Gulf of Carpentaria this weekend and the monsoon trough is currently crossing Cape York near Cooktown. If the trough comes further south then there will be the chance of heavy rain. Contingency plans are in place to collect the feeding stations, with their wet weather hats, in the event of a cyclone.

The site of IP18 had been under about 6 metres of water last wet season. So far there have been no high floods this wet season. Weather permitting; the next round of sticky mats and acaricide strips in the managed colonies will take place next week.

The next phone hook-up is scheduled for Friday 23 January, 2009 and the next Advice is due then. However, I hope that in the intervening time I will be able to report that the nest of cerana has been found but as I said above this is very much dependant on the weather.

Trevor Weatherhead - 9 January 2009

ONE BIOSECURITY

The Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements – Report to the Australian Government.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Biosecurity management is a difficult and complex task

Australia's biosecurity regime seeks, through careful management, to minimise the risk of the entry, establishment or spread of exotic pests and diseases that have the potential to cause significant harm to people, animals, plants and other aspects of Australia's unique environment.

Australia's privileged pest and disease status confers significant economic, environmental and community benefits. It assists the competitiveness of Australia's agricultural exports in global markets. Benefits to the environment also accrue through reduction in the use of chemicals to control pests and diseases and the enhancement of all Australians' quality of life. The community values freedom from pests and diseases that cut short or affect the quality of human life in many other countries.

The task of managing Australia's complex biosecurity regime has never been easy. In recent years, it has become even more challenging, principally for the following reasons:

- globalisation, which is integrating the world economy and increasing the volume and range of products traded internationally;
- population spread into new habitats and increasingly intensive agriculture, which increases the risk of zoonoses (that is, animal diseases capable of transmission to human populations) and complicates the ability to contain, and increases the impact of, a pest or disease incursion;
- growth in tourism, passenger and cargo movements, which increases the risks of exotic pest and disease incursions despite the best efforts of border security;
- the potential risk of agri-terrorism involving animal rights extremists or political terrorist organisations;
- increasing global movements of genetic material as farmers endeavour to increase productivity, which places particular demands on pre- and post border biosecurity services;
- climate change, which adds to the spread of pests and diseases (expanding range or habitats, changing migratory bird patterns, and weather events supporting the spread of disease vectors);
- an emerging shortage of highly qualified plant and animal pest and disease professionals—partly associated with 'baby boomer' retirements and partly the result of competing career alternatives;
- physical constraints for border interception activities, especially at major passenger airports; and
- financial constraints, as governments allocate scarce revenue among many competing demands.

In recent years, biosecurity events have received prominence in the media as never before, often for the wrong reasons:

- the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom, accompanied by graphic television footage of burning pyres of livestock carcasses;
- the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Europe and North America, a major animal disease, which has resulted in a number of human deaths and disrupted trade;
- the emergence of a highly pathogenic zoonotic disease in poultry flocks—the H5N1 strain of avian influenza—which gave rise to concerns of pandemic risks for humans;
- the outbreak in Australia of equine influenza, which led to widespread disruptions to horse movements, thoroughbred racing and recreational equestrian events—a necessary part of what proved to be a successful, if costly, eradication campaign;

- incursions, some of which have been eradicated, of several exotic pests and diseases into Australia, such as European house borer, tramp ants, sugar cane smut, grapevine leaf rust, citrus canker, Khapra beetle, and currant-lettuce aphid; and
- controversial and at times heated exchanges, before Parliamentary Committees, in the media, in the courts, and before the World Trade Organization, involving the potential import of products such as pigmeat, apples, prawns and prawn products, bananas, salmon and chicken meat.

Against this background, the decision to commission a comprehensive review of Australia's quarantine and biosecurity systems has been timely, the previous such review (undertaken by the Nairn Committee) having reported in 1996.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Extending the Commonwealth's reach

1 The Commonwealth's biosecurity legislation should provide that authority given by the Commonwealth to import goods into Australia also authorises the goods to be imported into a state or territory on the same conditions (if any). It should provide that this authority operates to the exclusion of any state or territory law that imposes biosecurity regulation on the direct, or indirect via another state or territory, import of the goods into the state or territory.

2 The biosecurity legislation should provide necessary legislative authority for a comprehensive system of tracing imported goods, including from their production or manufacture, through Australia's Biosecurity border and into the community, to ensure that, among other things, the Commonwealth is able to enforce any biosecurity conditions imposed on the goods. The specifics, including priorities for application to products or classes of product, should be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Authorised officers should be provided with comprehensive and consistent investigative, enforcement and prosecutorial powers.

3 As part of this extended reach, the Commonwealth should increase its resources to support the monitoring, surveillance, investigation and, where appropriate, prosecutions associated with post-border Biosecurity detections (see also Recommendation 74).

4 The Commonwealth should extend its legislative reach to cover the field with respect to international and domestic ballast water regulation.

5 In relation to biofouling, the Commonwealth's legislative reach should be restricted to international vessels arriving in Australia, with the states and territories retaining responsibility for domestic biofouling requirements. The Commonwealth should promote the development of an international convention covering biofouling through the International Maritime Organization.

6 The biosecurity legislation should continue to provide for national powers to deal with biosecurity emergencies. However, the powers should not be limited to quarantinable pests and diseases and associated measures and emergencies. They should clearly extend to biosecurity measures generally and biosecurity emergencies supported by the Commonwealth's constitutional reach. The opportunity should be taken to rationalise and simplify the existing powers, including by providing that they may be invoked or exercised by the Minister rather than the Governor-General.

7 The biosecurity legislation should provide the Commonwealth with the capacity to override a specified law of a state or territory that imposes biosecurity controls on the use, movement, treatment or disposal of domestic goods imported into the state or territory from another state or territory. This capacity should only be available where the National Biosecurity Commission has determined that the biosecurity controls:

- a) are not justified by an examination and evaluation of available scientific information; or
- b) are more trade restrictive than required and so constitute a disguised restriction on interstate trade and commerce in domestic product(s).

8 The National Biosecurity Commission may only assess and make such a determination in relation to a biosecurity control under a state or territory law if an application for such an assessment and determination has been made by the relevant Commonwealth or state or territory Minister.

A national biosecurity agreement

9 A National Agreement on Biosecurity, to underpin a partnership approach between the Commonwealth and the states and territories on biosecurity, should provide for:

- a) the Commonwealth to consult with the states and territories on the Appropriate Level of Protection and Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis Guidelines and priorities for considering market access requests;
- b) the Commonwealth to consult with the states and territories on the appointment of members of the National Biosecurity Commission (other than the Director of Biosecurity);
- c) emergency response policy and arrangements, including the circumstances in which the Commonwealth would utilise its national emergency management powers;
- d) the steps preceding the Commonwealth's use of its legislative authority to override inappropriate state and territory controls on interstate trade in domestic products;
- e) joint decisions on national priorities for investment by jurisdictions, including in monitoring and surveillance (including identifying national priority exotic pests and diseases for Commonwealth investment), research and development and biosecurity infrastructure; and
- f) full and automatic information sharing between jurisdictions (in a manner consistent with obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*), including information collected through pre-border intelligence activities, border controls (such as interception data) and information gathered through monitoring and surveillance programs (see Recommendation 54).

10 The National Agreement on Biosecurity should replace existing intergovernmental agreements such as the *Memorandum of Understanding on Animal and Plant Quarantine Measures* and the *Intergovernmental Agreement on AusBIOSEC*.

11 The aim should be to develop the Biosecurity Act (see Recommendation 43) and negotiate the National Agreement on Biosecurity within two years. While agreement with the states and territories is highly desirable, the Commonwealth should reserve the right to proceed with the Panel's recommendations unilaterally, or with a limited number of participating states and territories, if agreement is not forthcoming within that timeframe.

Independent science-based decision making

12 The biosecurity legislation should provide that Biosecurity Import Policy Determinations should be made by an expert and independent National Biosecurity Commission. The Commission's functions, basis of appointment and decision making rules should be specified under the biosecurity legislation. Its functions should include providing expert advice to the National Biosecurity Authority (see Recommendation 16) and the Government on biosecurity matters more generally.

13 The Commission should include members with expertise in natural sciences related to risks of pests and diseases in plants, animals and humans, risk assessment and management, ecology, agricultural and food production and economic assessments. The Commission should comprise no fewer than seven and no more than nine members, including the head of the National Biosecurity Authority.

14 More training should be provided to biosecurity officials on principles of proper decision making and the types of conduct that may amount to offences against them or breaches of the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct.

15 The biosecurity legislation should create a targeted offence of assaulting, resisting, molesting, obstructing, intimidating or interfering with officers in the performance of their duties, analogous to that in the *Customs Act 1901* and the *Civil Aviation Act 1988*.

National Biosecurity Authority

16 The primary biosecurity functions currently within AQIS, Biosecurity Australia and Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division should be brought together in a statutory authority—the National Biosecurity Authority. The National Biosecurity Authority should be an independent authority under the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* with the head of the Authority having the personnel and management powers and obligations of a Secretary under that Act. Its functions should include protecting Australia’s biosecurity status in accordance with Australia’s treaty obligations and Appropriate Level of Protection, as well as providing secretariat, research and administrative support to the National Biosecurity Commission in the conduct of its functions. The head of the Authority should be referred to as the Director of Biosecurity.

17 An eminent Australian should be appointed as the part-time Chair of the National Biosecurity Commission, with the Director of Biosecurity being an *ex-officio* member of the Commission.

18 The biosecurity legislation should expressly provide that the National Biosecurity Commission, and officers and other authorised personnel performing National Biosecurity Commission functions, are not subject to direction by the Government in performing their duties in relation to Biosecurity Import Policy Determinations. The legislation should also prevent the Government directing the Director of Biosecurity or his/her delegate, in relation to an import permit decision.

19 The export inspection and certification functions of AQIS should be transferred to the National Biosecurity Authority, but trade facilitation should remain a role of the Department, with technical expertise provided by the Authority as needed.

20 The Commonwealth should establish within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, a statutory office of the Inspector General of Biosecurity that will audit and report on the performance of the National Biosecurity Authority. The legislation should provide that the holder of this office have appropriate skills in relevant scientific and auditing or systems assessment disciplines. The appointment should be made by the Minister for a five year term and there should not be limitations on the appointment of persons on the grounds that they have been previously employed in the Australian Public Service or otherwise by the Australian Government.

21 The functions of the Inspector General of Biosecurity should subsume those recommended by Commissioner Callinan for the Inspector General of Horse Importation.

22 The biosecurity legislation should require that the Commonwealth obtain the support of any five of the states and territories before it can appoint the Chair and members of the National Biosecurity Commission, other than the Director of Biosecurity.

Sharing responsibility

23 A Biosecurity Advisory Council (replacing the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council) should:

- a)** be established to provide strategic and policy advice on biosecurity issues to the Minister, to the National Biosecurity Commission and to the Director of Biosecurity; and
- b)** consist of non-representative members with a broad range of skills in biosecurity and related disciplines drawn from the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, business, academia and non-government organisations.

24 Commodity and/or sector based Industry Consultative Committees should continue to discuss operational biosecurity issues including the delivery of services and cost recovery for those services.

25 All animal, plant and aquatic industries should commit to sharing the responsibility and costs of pest and disease response actions, with those who are not signatories to the relevant cost sharing agreement meeting their share of a response, possibly by way of levy to recover costs.

26 The membership of Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia should be broadened to encompass environmental pest and disease issues including those affecting the aquatic and terrestrial environments.

27 To enhance biosecurity planning:

- a) where Industry Biosecurity Plans already exist, there should be strong encouragement for their implementation at an individual business level;
- b) industries or sectors that are vulnerable but not covered by Biosecurity Plans (for example, the aquatic wildcatch and aquaculture industries), should be encouraged to develop a Biosecurity Plan; and
- c) governments should work with managers of land for conservation purposes to ensure that they have appropriate biosecurity plans and practices.

28 There should be:

- a) greater consistency in the administration, auditing, and response to non-compliance of co-regulators;
- b) reduced regulatory burdens for businesses that maintain an excellent track record of compliance with co-regulatory agreements; and
- c) wider adoption of co-regulatory arrangements.

29 To enhance communications effectiveness:

- a) messages promoting Australia's biosecurity should cover the biosecurity continuum;
- b) new communication options, including those available on the Internet, should be employed by the National Biosecurity Authority; and
- c) particular efforts should be made in collaboration with the states and territories, local governments, community and business groups to inform peri-urban farmers, including from non-English speaking backgrounds, of Australia's biosecurity policies and to engage them in monitoring, surveillance and response strategies.

30 The National Biosecurity Authority should develop education and awareness programs for:

- a) all importers regarding their obligations to meet Australia's import requirements; and
- b) the competent inspection and certifying agencies in the exporting countries to ensure that they meet Australia's import requirements.

Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection and its implementation

31 The biosecurity legislation should:

- a) define the concept of 'biosecurity risk' in a manner analogous to, but broader than, section 5D of the *Quarantine Act 1908*;
- b) provide that the basis for a decision whether to authorise, under the legislation, an import of goods should be that the level of biosecurity risk associated with the import is acceptably low;
- c) provide that the Minister may determine what level of biosecurity risk is acceptably low (that is, Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection), and may make Guidelines for Biosecurity Import Risk Analyses, Biosecurity Import Policy Determinations and import permit decisions. The determination and Guidelines should be legislative instruments for the purposes of the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*, and should not be disallowable; and

d) require that decision makers under the legislation (the National Biosecurity Commission in relation to Biosecurity Import Policy Determinations and the Director of Biosecurity in making import permit decisions) should be required to apply the Determination, and act in accordance with the Guidelines.

32 The Guidelines should:

- a)** include a clear statement of the approach to be taken to the economic assessment of potential biosecurity threats including the appropriate use of formal economic analysis; and
- b)** require estimation of net rather than gross costs, allowing for best practice management methods, substitution to alternative crops or husbandry techniques.

33 The National Biosecurity Commission should:

- a)** include high level economic skills (see Recommendation 13); and
- b)** develop a close working relationship with the Productivity Commission, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics or other suitable agencies.

34 The Eminent Scientists Group should be expanded to include an economist.

35 The:

- a)** Guidelines should include a requirement for the assessment of any relevant regional differences in biosecurity status and risk;
- b)** states and territories should be consulted on the terms of this requirement before it is included in the Guidelines; and
- c)** Commonwealth and the states and territories should develop a protocol on the collection and timely provision of the scientific evidence necessary to demonstrate biosecurity threat status to support both the Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis process and improved access to export markets for Australian products.

36 The biosecurity legislation should provide:

- a)** that when an import permit application is made for which a relevant Biosecurity Import Policy Determination exists, the Director of Biosecurity should have primary regard to that Determination in deciding whether to grant the permit, unless the Director has reason to believe that granting the permit would lead to a biosecurity risk that is not acceptably low. If the Director of Biosecurity denies an import permit on these grounds he/she must immediately inform the National Biosecurity Commission of the reasons; and
- b)** that the Director of Biosecurity have two options for dealing with market access and import permit applications for which there is no specific Biosecurity Import Policy Determination already in place:
 - if the Director is satisfied that the biosecurity risk involved is acceptably low, he/she should authorise importation, with or without conditions; and
 - if the Director is not satisfied that the biosecurity risk would be, or could be through imposing conditions, acceptably low, he/she should not grant a permit and should not provide market access, until the National Biosecurity Commission has made a Biosecurity Import Policy Determination following a Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis.

37 The biosecurity legislation should provide:

- a)** for three broad Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis processes—the existing standard and expanded Import Risk Analyses and a new process under which a greater obligation to prepare detailed information about relevant biosecurity risks would be placed on the proponent / applicant;
- b)** that, in conducting a Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis, the National Biosecurity Commission should have the power to compel the production of any relevant documents, the power to require relevant evidence to be given to it under oath and to hold public hearings;

- c) that in deciding priorities for Biosecurity Import Risk Analyses, the National Biosecurity Commission should consult with relevant Australian Government agencies, including the departments having responsibility for agriculture, health, environment and foreign affairs and trade, with the states and territories and with other appropriate stakeholders relevant to import access proposals; and
- d) the Minister with the power to direct the National Biosecurity Commission to commence a Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis, with such a direction to be tabled in Parliament.

38 The:

- a) Import Risk Analysis Appeals Panel should cease to exist as the review mechanism for determining whether a Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis has followed due process;
- b) Biosecurity Import Policy Determination should be a non-reviewable instrument;
- c) Eminent Scientists Group should be empowered to co-opt one or more Associate Members; and
- d) Eminent Scientists Group should be appointed by the Minister after consultation with the states and territories.

39 Merits review of import permit decisions should only be available where the Director of Biosecurity has made a decision to refuse to issue an import permit on the grounds that to do so would not be consistent with a Biosecurity Import Policy Determination. In addition, access to merits review should be subject to the following requirements:

- a) standing should be limited to the applicant for the permit;
- b) provisions should be established to guard against vexatious appeals; and
- c) there should be strict timeframes around the lodgement of appeals.

40 The National Biosecurity Commission should:

- a) provide stakeholders with advance notice of the release of draft Biosecurity Import Risk Analyses and issues papers to allow sufficient time to prepare responses; and
- b) include a draft Biosecurity Import Policy Determination with the draft Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis when it is released for public comment.

41 A memorandum of understanding should be developed between the National Biosecurity Commission and the Department of Health and Ageing to cover human health aspects of Biosecurity Import Risk Analyses.

42 The National Biosecurity Commission should have the professional capacity to assess risks to the environment and human health in a Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis to the same quality as agricultural assessments.

Legislation

43 A new Biosecurity Act should be drafted to replace the *Quarantine Act 1908* giving effect to the Panel's legislative recommendations, drawing on a much broader set of the Commonwealth's Constitutional powers and providing for modern and effective management of biosecurity risks.

Balancing risk and return

44 The balance and level of biosecurity resources across the continuum should be determined by a consistent analysis of risks and returns across programs. The level and allocation of resources should be comprehensively reviewed against risk-return profiles at least every five years.

45 The National Biosecurity Authority, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and the Biosecurity Advisory Council, should develop a list of national priority exotic pests and diseases, with their respective pathways, on the basis of the likelihood of incursion and the consequences for businesses, human health and

the environment. This list should be used to prioritise the review and development of comprehensive biosecurity risk management plans across the biosecurity continuum.

46 A new memorandum of understanding should be developed between the Department of Health and Ageing and the National Biosecurity Authority on delivery of human biosecurity services at the border, including clear operational guidelines for the Authority and procedures for validating health biosecurity measures, training and competency of inspection staff, resources, data collection, reporting and communication.

47 The Authority should enter into compliance agreements to recognise formally the food safety management systems of importing businesses. These arrangements should provide for a power of audit, inspection, suspension or removal of approvals, and penalties where appropriate for breaches.

48 The National Biosecurity Authority should be empowered to require in specific circumstances, as a condition of entry to the Australian market, that importers provide certification by the exporting country's competent government authorities that Australian food safety standards are met.

49 The National Biosecurity Authority should work with other countries and the states and territories to share pest and disease intelligence and consider working together with trading partner countries on issues such as regionalisation and compartmentalisation assessments and systems assurance.

50 The National Biosecurity Authority should establish an intelligence gathering and assessments group to monitor animal and plant pest and disease status internationally, with a particular focus on the region and our trading partners.

51 To improve the management of biosecurity risks, a sample sufficient to identify risks and risk pathways should be collected and analysed from cases where imported goods have been rejected because of suspicion of an exotic pest or disease. This should be done at the public expense.

52 The National Biosecurity Authority should undertake a continuing program of analysis of risk pathways using data collected from pre-border intelligence and border inspections at control points along the continuum. The results of this analysis should be used to update risk management strategies and measures.

53 The National Biosecurity Authority should develop and maintain, in consultation with the states and territories and business organisations, a comprehensive post-border monitoring and surveillance program for national priority exotic pests and diseases, which should include:

- a) an enhanced Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy that extends beyond the current 20km zone to provide coverage for at-risk areas around international airports, seaports and vulnerable areas of Australia's coastline;
- b) existing and additional port surveillance activities;
- c) the Commonwealth's responsibility for investigating suspected post-border detections of pests and diseases in imports;
- d) strategic surveillance to support Australia's pest and disease free export claims and the conduct of Biosecurity Import Risk Analyses;
- e) national priority marine pests and diseases to support the Commonwealth's expanded role in relation to managing risks associated with ballast water; and
- f) the current National Sentinel Hive Program and its eventual replacement with a more comprehensive approach based on an assessment of risks.

54 The information and analysis obtained from pre-border, border and post-border biosecurity activities should be made available for use by state and territory governments, industry and research organisations.

This should be done in a manner consistent with obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988* and should be supported by a biosecurity risk information sharing protocol and data sharing infrastructure.

55 Redevelopment of biosecurity information technology systems for the National Biosecurity Authority should occur promptly. As part of this task:

- a) information technology systems should be developed to provide intuitive and user friendly interfaces and processes;
- b) biosecurity risk research should be supported by providing reports and data in formats that are useful for government and other researchers, preferably via a free-to-access web interface;
- c) paper work generated between the Authority and businesses should be eliminated wherever feasible through electronic interfaces, on-line approval systems and electronic certification; and
- d) connectivity with other border agencies (particularly Customs) should be central and should also be enabled where possible with trading partner authorities, particularly with New Zealand.

56 The National Biosecurity Authority should work with state and territory agencies, professional associations and higher education providers to develop a general biosecurity course to be incorporated in health, environmental, marine biology, veterinary and agriculture science curricula. All staff employed in the National Biosecurity Authority should be taught an appropriate adaptation of the general biosecurity course upon commencement of their employment in the agency.

57 The National Biosecurity Authority should develop national research priorities, including for new technologies to better address biosecurity risk, and should work with research bodies to coordinate the research effort towards those priorities.

58 The National Biosecurity Authority should ensure Australia has the laboratory capability and capacity to manage exotic pest and disease incursions of national significance. The Panel recommends that the Authority, working with the states and territories, should improve the quality and use of state and territory laboratories to support national biosecurity priorities.

59 The import of positive control samples (including the foot and mouth disease virus) for use in laboratory diagnostic research and capacity building for exotic disease pathogens is vital and should be permitted under strict import permit conditions to laboratories such as the Australian Animal Health Laboratory.

60 The Commonwealth government should move toward a unified coordinated system for the approval of quarantine facilities (for animal and plant research laboratories). This would require agreement between the National Biosecurity Authority, Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator for one system of approval of laboratories.

61 The Commonwealth should own and operate specialised quarantine facilities where monopoly rents might be charged if such facilities were operated privately.

62 The Commonwealth should immediately clarify its intentions with respect to the future ownership, management and operation of the quarantine facilities currently located at Eastern Creek and Knoxfield.

63 All quarantine stations that manage equivalent risks should have their performance accredited and audited to equivalent standards, irrespective of whether the quarantine station is privately or publicly owned and operated.

64 The effectiveness of the anti-smuggling subsidy for plant material should be reviewed, with other avenues explored for improving compliance with biosecurity requirements, including a review of smuggling penalties.

Ensuring the integrity of the system

65 The National Biosecurity Authority should develop quality management systems that:

- a) incorporate consistent quality management approaches across its programs;
- b) include periodic audit of external assurances such as official certification provided by overseas authorities and accredited third-party systems; and
- c) include, where relevant, ISO 9000 and other quality standards in introducing these quality management strategies and systems.

66 The National Biosecurity Authority should establish an internal audit group to inquire and report on the adherence by the Authority to its policies and their adequacy to deal with risks across the biosecurity continuum.

- a) The responsibilities of this group should include both financial and performance audits of the Authority's programs.
- b) The internal audit program should cover the National Biosecurity Authority's activities over an audit cycle.
- c) The audit reports should be provided to the National Biosecurity Commission and the Director of Biosecurity.

67 In relation to the National Biosecurity Authority's internal audit program, the National Biosecurity Commission should have:

- a) a determinative role for audit activities that relate to Biosecurity Import Policy Determinations; and
- b) an advisory role in relation to the overall internal audit program.

68 The National Biosecurity Authority should maintain an enforcement branch with the resources and expertise to investigate breaches of the biosecurity legislation, with this function being afforded a high priority. Arrangements should be made with the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to the conduct of prosecution of offences against the biosecurity legislation including to provide:

- a) protocols to facilitate the commencement of proceedings by the Authority in cases involving the non-payment of infringement notices which cover high-volume matters of minimal complexity; and
- b) for the recovery of pecuniary penalties by the Authority.

69 The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry should be enabled under the legislation to require the Inspector General of Biosecurity to inquire into any matter which is the responsibility of the National Biosecurity Authority.

70 The Inspector General of Biosecurity should develop a program of audit on appropriate timescales (for example, five years, one year and to allow for *ad hoc* audits).

71 The Inspector General of Biosecurity should provide regular independent reports to the Minister with these reports copied to the Director of Biosecurity and the National Biosecurity Commission. These reports should be made public unless a strong contrary reason exists. The Director of Biosecurity and the National Biosecurity Commission, as relevant, should report to the Minister on actions taken on recommendations by the Inspector General. The reports and responses to them should be reflected in the National Biosecurity Authority's annual report to Parliament.

72 The Biosecurity Advisory Council should provide advice on inspection and audit activities to the Director of Biosecurity.

Resourcing the biosecurity system

73 The Commonwealth should increase its biosecurity investment by an amount in the order of \$260 million per annum, subject to a full costing by departments, to meet the recommendations of this report. A significant part of this increase in resources should be funded through cost recovery and an adjustment to the Passenger Movement Charge.

74 The Commonwealth's additional post-border investment should be tied to an agreement with the states and territories on appropriate matching commitments (see also Recommendation 3).

75 Recognising past underinvestment, an additional \$225 million should be appropriated through the Commonwealth Budget over a number of years for investment in information technology and business systems for biosecurity. Future cost recovery arrangements should be adjusted to cover depreciation and replacement of that infrastructure.

76 Programs that currently use cost recovery should continue in this mode but charges for like activities should be aggregated, leading to a significant reduction in the number of individual charges.

77 In developing cost recovery arrangements, the National Biosecurity Authority should consult with business groups, but have the ultimate responsibility of recommending to the responsible Minister a cost recovery package that will support the provision of an effective and efficient regulatory function including:

- a) adequate and long-term investment in infrastructure, including information technology and information services;
- b) appropriate funding for staff and training;
- c) the costs of auditing pre-border and border biosecurity certification; and
- d) the cost of diagnosing a proportion of interceptions to inform a riskreturn approach to activities.

78 Cost recovery by the National Biosecurity Authority should be subject to periodic external review to ensure that:

- a) cost recovery reflects efficient costs and provides appropriate efficiency signals to the Authority;
- b) the cost recovery structure provides appropriate price signals for business performance;
- c) there is no long-term over-recovery; and
- d) costs are being aggregated wherever possible and that unnecessary constraints are not being placed on the use of revenue from a riskreturn perspective.

79 Export certification functions should return to 100 per cent cost recovery as scheduled at the beginning of July 2009, noting that this would require an early decision and announcement by the Government to allow businesses to prepare for the additional costs as well as for the necessary consultation on revised fee structures.

80 The Government should enhance Budget funding for activities which support biosecurity-related technical market access for Australian exporters.

81 Funding for the Airports Program should be adjusted in future on the basis of a Workload Growth Agreement established between the National Biosecurity Authority and the Department of Finance and Deregulation that links passenger numbers with Budget appropriations.

82 The Workload Growth Agreement should reflect a risk-return strategy for managing intervention rates and make appropriate allowances for productivity.

83 In developing the detailed budget for biosecurity functions, the Government should recognise the need for a significant enhancement in senior management capacity in the National Biosecurity Authority.

84 The National Biosecurity Authority should review staff training and rotation practices to ensure that they provide an optimum balance between development of broadly skilled officers, the deepening of expertise through experience in a role and the avoidance of regulatory failure through officers developing inappropriately close relationships with the clients they are servicing.

Major extracts affecting the Honey Bee Industry

7.4.6 National Sentinel Hive Program

Given the substantial economic cost of a varroa mite incursion, the Panel's view is that appropriate monitoring and surveillance arrangements need to be in place to support early detection. The investment required for this is insignificant relative to the risk of losses to the Australian economy that could result from an incursion.

The existing National Sentinel Hive Program should be continued until a more comprehensive arrangement is developed based on an assessment of risks. This more comprehensive arrangement would most likely use a mix of approaches at or around possible entry points (ports and airports)—including sentinel hives and bait hives (traps) that contain pheromones to attract bees. The mix of hives and traps would need to be in sufficient numbers with regular inspection to increase the likelihood of early detection. To ensure that it remains risk-based and effective, the new comprehensive arrangement should be built into the Commonwealth's national monitoring and surveillance program.

7.4.11 Post-arrival quarantine stations

Having access to appropriate post-arrival quarantine facilities for imported animals and plants is a fundamental part of managing biosecurity risks.

The Panel recommends that the uncertainty of the Commonwealth operated quarantine stations should be resolved urgently. The Panel shares Commissioner Callinan's view that there has been an unacceptable delay in resolving the number of Commonwealth-operated stations and their lease tenure arrangements. Leases on existing stations are due to expire within the next few years and, given the time to establish alternative facilities, the Commonwealth is fast running out of time to make considered decisions.

The Panel believes the assumption that the Commonwealth should be exclusively responsible for services for high biosecurity risk plants and animals is flawed—an example of the successful private provision of such high-risk biosecurity facilities is the operation over many years of egg hatching facilities by major poultry businesses. The Panel reiterates the Nairn Report's conclusion that with appropriate auditing, there is no reason why private sector operators cannot also provide biosecurity services, even for high-risk imports.

Equally, the Panel believes there is a case for the Commonwealth to own and operate specialised facilities where monopoly rents might be charged (either to the Commonwealth in a lease-back arrangement, or to biosecurity customers) if such facilities were operated privately. In the case of low volume products, the private provision of biosecurity services may not be viable. One view is that such imports should simply be not allowed, but the Panel considers that facilities need to be provided to ensure a legal and biosecurity-safe method of importing organisms. An example is the importation of honeybee brood stock which could be smuggled into the country if no accessible, legitimate means were made available.

AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

Accounting for bees as trading stock

The Commissioner of Taxation has recently released a package of materials that are of specific interest to beekeepers. This material includes Taxation Determination TD 2008/26, Law Administration Practice

Statement PS LA 2008/4 (GA) and also a helpful fact sheet. All of these are available from our website, ato.gov.au.

The Taxation Determination states that the Commissioner considers bees kept in a honey-production business are trading stock of the beekeeper. This is based on the long-standing principles contained in Division 70 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

The Practice Statement gives guidance about how to value trading stock, which basically allows beekeepers to count the number of live hives they have and multiply that number by a dollar value. The practice statement also highlights that most beekeepers with less than 500 hives will not need to account for trading stock in their tax returns.

For larger beekeepers, the Commissioner is only expecting that you will start accounting for trading stock from the year ending 30 June 2009 if you are not already doing so. It is something that you would calculate for your tax return at the end of this year.

The fact sheet summarises all of the tax law material in the Determination and Practice Statement into a simpler document.

Need more information?

If you need more information about bees as trading stock you can:

- speak to your tax adviser
- phone **13 72 86** (tax practitioners only)
- phone **13 28 66**
- write to us at PO Box 3000, Penrith NSW 2740

WORK WANTED

My name is Frank LAMI. I am 23 years and I am French. I am looking for a place in a bee farm. I am interested to learn new work method. I don't want money, but if you can give me a place for sleep and the meal, it could be nice. Now I am in Sydney but I can move everywhere. I did the same thing in New Zealand last year. I worked for three different bee farms: Mr Don Simm (400 hives), Berry brothers, (Arataki honey 1500 hives), Kintail honey (10000 hives). My parents are beekeepers and we have 200 hives. I am very interested about selection and queen breeding. If you are not interested about my proposition but you can give me beekeeper address for work, I will be happy. Thank you for your attention about my email.

Cordially, *Frank Lami*

lami_frank@hotmail.com

I'm 23 years, I'm from Belgium and I'm a beekeeper. In September, I'll come to Australia for 9 month, and I would like to find a job in beekeeping, because it's my passion and I can't imagine one year without my bees! Could you help me? Do you engage? Do you know some addresses where I can write?

Thank you for your help.

Pauline Sovet

pauline_sovet@hotmail.com

WESTERN AUSTRALIA STATE GOVERNMENT APPROVES SMALL SCALE COMMERCIAL GM CANOLA TRIALS

The State Government today announced its decision to allow approval of limited commercial-size trials for genetically modified canola to go ahead in Western Australia. Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman

said the announcement will allow trial crops to be planted in 2009 involving around 20 farmers and approximately 1000 hectares.

“This decision is a prudent and responsible one - to proceed in a cautious manner by allowing research to continue into the use of GM technology. I firmly believe the role of any Government is to ensure farmers have the choice and the tools to expand their businesses and grow their profitability,” Mr Redman said.

“GM canola could potentially offer higher yields through better weed control and less fuel usage. Successful development of Roundup Ready canola could see canola grown over lower rainfall areas. This would be a great outcome for the entire state.”

“The locations of the trials are to be determined. Growers that are interested will undergo stewardship training and then the proponent together with CBH will select up to 20 growers to undertake the trials under conditions approved by the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

“I am confident that CBH has the protocols in place to manage the co-existence process to effectively segregate GM and non-GM canola through the transport, storage and marketing processes. These trials will assess those protocols as well as look at the agronomic performance of the crop.

“The Department of Agriculture and Food will work collaboratively with industry through the trials and assist all industry participants with auditing and on-site inspection of the new trials. The Department will then analyse the results of the trials.”

“The decision follows a long consultative process with industry, the public, Local Government, and overseas experience.”

Mr Redman said there would be stringent safeguards in place for the management of these trials. “The trials will be managed in a closed-loop system which requires the product to be delivered to a specified receival point and processed by specified oil crushers.

“This is the same management system that is being used successfully in New South Wales and Victoria, where Roundup Ready canola was grown for the first time this year.”

Mr Redman said that he recognised concern in the community surrounding the issue of labelling in regard to GM food products. “Labelling is an issue that requires a national perspective which is why I am following the national review of labelling with great interest. Linked in with this, I am establishing a WA intergovernmental committee. This committee will investigate the issues of appropriate consumer information, labelling requirements and compliance with regard to GM foods,” he said.

GM - WA DECISION GOES FOR GREEN

The Western Australian government’s announcement to allow GM canola in 2009 builds on the recent GM cotton decision and will provide growers with the opportunity to assess new plant varieties which deliver sustainability benefits.

“Today’s announcement reflects the science and the facts that approved GM food and fibre crops are an important tool in meeting our agriculture and food production challenges,” said Ms Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Agrifood Awareness Australia.

“108 farmers in New South Wales and Victoria have grown Australia’s first GM canola crop this year and are reporting positive results including better weed control and increased yields,” she said.

“Western Australian growers will now have the opportunity, 13 years after their Canadian competitors, to assess these new varieties for their own farming systems,” she said.

“Growers in WA have been growing herbicide resistant canola for years, but these new varieties developed with the assistance of gene technology, will provide new opportunities, particularly increased yields of canola, a greater choice of weed control options, and the use of more environmentally friendly herbicides,” she said.

The Australian grains industry has long recognised the requirements of all customers. With regards to GM canola, the industry has demonstrated its commitment to delivering choice through the statement entitled ‘Delivering market choice with GM canola’.

- In the statement, major participants in Australia's grain supply chain, including CBH, the PGA and WA Farmers, committed to introduce GM canola in a manner that:
- Maintained or enhanced trade in Australian canola
- Enabled market choice along the supply chain
- Would be open and transparent
- Provided confidence to all stakeholders, including customers, consumers and governments.

“The industry’s capacity to meet market requirements and deliver choice is well recognised, and the Western Australian government’s appreciation of the value in adopting this technology is to be acknowledged,” she said.

The key GM facts

- Globally, in 2007, 114.3 million hectares of GM crops were planted around the world, by 12 million farmers in 23 countries, representing a 67-fold increase since the new varieties first became available in 1996
- Gene technology in Australia is regulated by the Federal Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR).
- All GM foods must undergo a rigorous safety assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) before they can be sold in Australia.
- GM cotton has been grown in Queensland and New South Wales since 1996. These varieties are insect resistant, herbicide tolerant or a combination of both.
- GM cotton, accounting for over 90 per cent of the industry, has delivered an 85 per cent reduction in pesticide use, reduced fuel use, enhanced water-use efficiency and minimised cultivation, which in-turn reduces the carbon footprint.
- Over 85 per cent of the Canadian canola crop is now sown to GM varieties and these have been marketed to Japan, China, Korea, Bangladesh and other south-east Asian markets.
- 108 farmers planted Australia’s first GM canola crop in NSW and Victoria this year. They are reporting better weed control and increased yields.
- A recent Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) report (available at: <http://affashop.gov.au/product.asp?prodid=14174>) supports earlier conclusions from Charles Sturt and Melbourne Universities (see: <http://www.jcci.unimelb.edu.au/canola2007.html>) that GM canola can provide growers with higher yields and a greater choice of weed control options including more environmentally friendly herbicides.
- The Australian grains industry has long recognised the requirements of all its customers. With regards to GM canola, the industry has committed to delivering choice through its statement “Delivering market choice with GM canola” (available at: [http://www.afa.com.au/pdf/Delivering Market Choice with GM canola.pdf](http://www.afa.com.au/pdf/Delivering_Market_Choice_with_GM_canola.pdf))

MASSIVE CRACKDOWN ON THE USE OF SCORES OF TOXIC PESTICIDES

December 23, 2008

Europe has passed legislation to reduce pesticide use. Let's hope other countries will follow this example.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/massive-crackdown-on-the-use-of-scores-of-toxic-pesticides-1206399.html>

Britain is to get its toughest crackdown on toxic substances in food and the environment, despite determined resistance to the safety measures from Gordon Brown.

The pesticide regulations will provide better protection for bees, whose numbers have fallen alarmingly across Europe. Scores of pesticides suspected of causing cancer, DNA damage and "gender-bender" effects are to be phased out under new EU rules, which are being hailed as a revolution in the way the public is protected against poisonous chemicals.

The use of all pesticides in public places is to be dramatically reduced, with aerial spraying banned anywhere in the country. Yesterday environmentalists hailed the measures - to be adopted following long negotiations between the European Parliament and individual governments - as a "landmark", while the National Farmers' Union called them "devastating". The agrochemical industry has bitterly resisted them, backed by the Prime Minister, who has voiced his concern that they would damage agriculture and food production without significantly benefiting health or the environment.

Almost half of all food eaten throughout Europe has been discovered to be contaminated by pesticides, with six of the most dangerous substances among the 10 most frequently found.

The European Parliament has long been pressing, with strong cross-party support, for radical controls, despite opposition from some governments, especially Britain. The new measures are the result of a compromise between the two sides, hammered out last week.

Under the deal, a list of 22 particularly hazardous chemicals used in scores of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides will gradually be phased out to avoid abrupt withdrawal from the market. The chemicals will be given a further five years' grace if banning them would put crops in serious danger. Pesticide use is to be kept to "a minimum" in parks, playgrounds, schools and near hospitals. Aerial spraying will be banned unless given exceptional approval by safety authorities.

Industry will have to release the results of any studies that show harmful effects, and there is to be better protection for bees, whose numbers have been falling alarmingly across Europe. The National Farmers' Union said that the measures - which will have to be finally confirmed by the Parliament and EU leaders early in the New Year - "will have a devastating effect on the horticultural industry and will see a reduction in crop yield and quality", and would also force up prices.

But environmentalists dismissed this as "scaremongering", pointing out that only a small minority of the 507 substances in pesticides would be banned. Though they would have liked even tougher controls, they still hailed the agreement as a breakthrough. Hiltrud Breyer, the German Green MEP who steered the proposals through the parliament, called them a "milestone for the environment, health and consumer protection". "The EU is setting a global precedent by phasing out highly toxic pesticides," she said.

Yesterday, Nick Mole, of the Pesticides Action Network, said: "This is a landmark, the biggest ever crackdown on poisonous chemicals... It says that anything hazardous to health or the environment will have to go, rather than taking the position... that if it is used properly it can be tolerated."

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Congratulations to Dr Denis Anderson

At the December meeting of The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council an Award of Excellence was given to Dr Denis Anderson, Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO Entomology, for his long term service to the Apiary Industry.

The Award of Excellence is awarded each year by the AHBIC Executive for those who have made an outstanding contribution to Industry.

Denis's past and ongoing work on behalf of the industry was considered to be of such exemplary quality and his enthusiasm meant he was a standout for this award.



Dr Denis Anderson receiving his award from AHBIC Chairman, Mr Lindsay Bourke

CROP & STOCK REPORTS

NEW SOUTH WALES

The Northern half of the state has experienced good to very good rains over the past 3-4 months, however the Southern half is still very dry. Grasshoppers are still a concern in the Southern regions.

Most beekeepers, both Southern and Northern have managed to get some honey. The North Coast has been disappointing, with most producers having to move inland to achieve some crop. Hive beetles are causing considerable damage.

Summer Ironbark and Coolibah are budded in patches in the North and at time of writing are giving mixed results.

River Red Gum in the South is reported to be doing reasonably well, however flower is browning off quickly with the dry.

White Box is beginning to show some bud in patches, too early to tell if it will be general.

Spotted Gum is continuing to hold its bud on the South Coast and in areas which have had sufficient rain in the far West. Yapunyah could be a prospect for late autumn – winter.

Some small stocks held by beekeepers, however over the next few months these stocks could disappear as summer honey flows come to an end and autumn flowerings not materialise.

Prices continue to hold firm around the \$2.90/kg range.

Bill Weiss

QUEENSLAND

The season has slowed with the onset of hot dry conditions in the South East.

Hill Gum is finishing and only yielded a small crop. Grey ironbark and Brush Box have come and gone with only modest yields reported. Carpet Grass went well for a short time. Hives have been reported to be in reasonable condition and holding. Requeening continues while conditions last.

One major concern for packers will be the potential of a crop of Soapy Leaf (Red Ash). This unusually flavoured honey will provide good build conditions and with rain at least a round of honey to boost bees before the potential of Gum Topped Box and Pilliga Box flows.

Honey producers are now looking for quick budders for late summer and autumn corps. Gum Topped Box will be closely watched along with Pilliga Box. Good rains in the Channel Country will need follow up rains in late summer to ensure a potential Yapunyah crop. Coolibah may still attract some beekeepers, though reports do not indicate a lot of growth on the trees. Silver Leaved Ironbark has not been reported to be yielding. Budding was promising but not widespread.

Small Hive Beetles (SHB) have played havoc with coastal beekeepers and are present in increasing numbers around extracting sheds. Spraying the outside perimeter of the shed will help to control this major pest. The industry urgently needs control measures to curb SHB numbers. Resisting the temptation to play with chemical control is becoming increasingly hard. No chemicals are registered for in hive control of the SHB.

There do not appear to be any large stockpiles of honey being held by honey producers at this time.

Bill Winner

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Blue Gum, which has now finished, has been the best for years. Red Gum is nearly finished, however it has yielded quite well considering the weather. While dryland Lucerne has yielded well in most areas, the irrigated sites are just starting to get into full swing – so far this is yielding well.

Future prospects look good with Peppermint (*Euc. Odorata*) and Dryland Tea Tree (*Mel. Lanceolata*). Potato weed has germinated everywhere - it needs a little more rain to reach any potential. 2 - 3 inches of rain in November and December makes all the difference. Can we be greedy and hope for the same before the end of January?

Bees are generally in good health.

Wendy Thiele

TASMANIA

Tasmanian Beekeepers have experienced very difficult conditions over the last 3 months. Continuous cold, rain, frosts & wind put a great deal of pressure on the maintenance of hives and the preparation for the honey season. The feeding regime continued up till Christmas. Queenless hives became the norm as large populations were sitting with nothing to do. Finally the last week has shown promise of an improvement and where Blackberries and Clover are still in bloom with the summer finally arriving for the last 3 days, we should begin ground flora honey production. Below to average production predicted.

Continuous rain on the West Coast has resulted in a late move to the Leatherwood sites where the trees are just beginning to flower. At this stage it does not look to be a good flowering. Ti tree in full bloom but this is not a desirable honey. Some hives are being moved to early sites 3 weeks later than normal.

It is quite possible that some hives will not be moved at all. The ensuing 2-3 weeks weather will determine the outcome. A below average yield is forecast for leatherwood as the rain has caused the buds to go brown and drop off.

Ian Stephens

VICTORIA

November weather began with general rains over most of the State with up to 100ml in the north east and 150 to 200ml in Gippsland, resulting in more flooding of some of the Gippsland river systems. December weather began with typical warm and dry, culminating with more heavy rain over three days just prior to Christmas. The early November rains extended the flowering of Paterson's Curse in the higher rainfall areas north of Albury (NSW), resulting in some beekeepers harvesting substantial quantities of honey.

Canola through southern Victoria has also yielded well. As the Canola blossom went off from early November onwards, Cape Weed yielded honey with, in some cases, bee hives filling.

Swamp Gum (*Euc. ovata*) followed its usual pattern of useful pollen and a little thin nectar on warmer days.

With the cessation of the Curse and Canola, the major emphasis has been to keep bee hives strong in the hope of autumn honey crops.

The patches of Red Gum (*Euc. camaldulensis*) budding in the western district and elsewhere began to flower towards the end of November. There was a large movement of bee hives onto the Red Gum and it started to yield some honey, but the Christmas rains brought this honey flow to a halt.

Some beekeepers have extracted a reasonable crop of Red Gum honey, but many bee hives only gathered enough to sustain themselves.

Blackberry, in the foothill country ie north east and central Victoria has helped to sustain bee hives.

Yellow Stringy Bark (*Euc. muellerana*) in Gippsland has been slowly yielding honey since early December with good bees filling a box in 2-3 weeks. In the early stages pollen supply was meagre, but improved dramatically before Christmas.

Clover in South Gippsland, south-west Victoria and irrigated Clover in northern Victoria is also heavily stocked over the summer.

Beekeepers have reported heavy outbreaks of European Foul Brood from mid October into November, followed by a heavier than usual outbreak of Chalk Brood in recent weeks.

Future Prospects – The hope for Grey Box (*Euc. microcarpa*) to set buds for March/April flowering has, generally, not materialised. There is the possibility that there could be a few pockets budded – mostly on bigger trees in the open country – but mostly, Grey Box is a vista of new growth with very little budding.

Iron Bark (*Euc. tricarpa*) is a slightly better story. Summer flowering Iron bark has set a reasonable crop of buds varying in places from 20-25% of trees to – in odd places – heavy budding on all trees.

Winter flowering Iron Bark has also set a heavy crop of buds and, in places, the buds are well forward and could flower in late autumn.

North West Mallee – The summer rain in the Mallee has improved the prospect for Acorn Mallee (*Euc. oleosa*) yielding some honey.

Skeleton Weed is flowering well and will help to provide good breeding conditions.

If we get a continuation of the summer rains, Strawberry Clover in both South Gippsland and the south west of the State could yield some honey and provide good breeding conditions into March.

Honey Markets – The erratic instability in our wholesale honey prices of recent years has again reared its ugly head. With the short honey crop of 2006-07 the very poor prospects for honey production for 2007-08 prices had quietly firmed up during the last 12 months to a high of \$3per kilo for any reasonable quality honey, with scarce choice quality honeys offering a little higher.

This has come to a sudden halt with a larger honey packer abruptly dropping prices to producers by approximately 80cents per kg with the blunt statement that beekeepers must ‘take it or leave it’.

One of the major reasons cited for this action is that the supermarkets are creating pressure to lower prices. This flies in the face of statements by supermarkets and governments that consumers will be paying higher prices for all food because of reduced production.

There has been a large shift in the marketing of honey by producers in recent years and the depressed prices offered by some honey packers in a season of low production is increasing this shift. Many producers are attempting to market their own honey direct to the consumer at the Farm Gate and through Sunday & Farmers’ Markets.

Green Grocers, Butchers and Health Food shops have also moved into stocking honey and are providing good outlets for substantial quantities of honey from producer/packers of various sized enterprises. Whether we view this as good for our industry or not depends on our individual perspective. For some it is a matter of ‘needs must’.

The price stability we had for many years with a few major packers controlling the marketing of the bulk of the honey produced has now been lost. Under the erratic wholesale honey pricing system we now have in place no commercial beekeeper can forward plan for the future of his/her business with any degree of certainty.

Bob McDonald

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Jarrah is not as good as expected with only small quantities of pure Jarrah. As the Jarrah finishes the White Gum is producing a little honey.

Coastal & Forest Black Butt are just starting to produce and look good in some areas.

Banksia has been producing well during summer.

Beekeepers are just moving onto early Red Gum which is budding very well and should produce an above average crop.

Stephen Fewster