

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 Communique at

http://www.daff.gov.au/about/mediacentre/communiques/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