



AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

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BRIEFING NOTES

1 March 2011

Re: Australian Honey Industry

As you may be aware the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) is the peak body representing the Apiary Industry in Australia. Members of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council include:

- New South Wales Apiarists' Association
- Queensland Beekeepers' Association
- South Australian Apiarists' Association
- Tasmanian Beekeepers' Association
- Victorian Apiarists' Association
- Western Australian Farmers Federation - Beekeepers Section
- Honey Packers' and Marketers' Association of Australia
- National Council of Pollination Associations
- Australian Queen Bee Breeders' Association

Industry has written to Members of Federal Parliament seeking their support for the Honey Bee Industry at a time of unprecedented challenges and threats. These threats in the longer term threaten the very food supply of all Australians.

Honey bees and beekeepers are found in all states of Australia - some 10,000 beekeepers using approximately 600,000 hives, to produce anything between 20-30 thousand metric tonnes annually. The bee industry contributes around \$80 million a year to the Australian economy through honey and related products.

In addition, the contribution of pollination services to agriculture is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually.

At the time of writing, many of my members have faced the challenges of floods in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, fires in Victoria, drought and the continued frustration of low commodity prices, whilst at the same time rising to the challenges of protecting the Australian environment and food security for the nation as a whole.

Our member organisations can trace their history back to over a hundred years of beekeeping in Australia and recent events both in Australia and overseas to the plight of bees is such that it should be a wake-up call for all Australians. The food security of our nation is at risk.

Despite being a small industry, today we have taken the unprecedented step of sending jars of honey to every Federal Parliamentary member and members of the press gallery to highlight what we see are real and substantial threats to our industry and Australia's food supply, which if allowed to go unchecked will result in greater disasters down the road.

We would also add our support to the initiatives being undertaken by our members and other concerned citizens and supporters who are also in their own way drawing attention to Industry's plight.

Industry seeks support for the following initiatives:

- 1) *Further funding for the eradication of Apis cerana in Cairns Queensland.* The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) continues to support the eradication of this vicious pest. The Government has decided not to eradicate this pest.

This decision is bad for the public. An independent economic research study was commissioned from RIRDC titled '*Estimating the Potential Public Costs of the Asian Honeybee Incursion*'.

This report has two key findings of the potential public costs of the Asian bee incursion. The costs of public health impacts are conservatively estimated to range from \$84,114-\$88,636 per 100,000 people. The cost for the public nuisance aspects are estimated to range from \$4,500-\$33,660 per 100,000 people.

The decision is also bad for the environment.

- If Asian bees are allowed to establish in Australia they will become the 'cane toads' of the insect world directly affecting thousands of Australian insects, birds and mammals.
- In the insect world Australia has an estimated 3,000 species of native bees that totally rely on flowers for food. This is the most important group of pollinators of native plants in Australia. Beetles, wasps, ants, butterflies, moths and flies all rely to a varying degree on the nectar and pollen produced by flowers for a food source.

The pest itself however has particular ramifications for Australia's tourism industry. The Asian bee becomes a pest in urban areas through establishing nests in houses and its aggressive stinging behaviour. It will also disturb native fauna such as native bees, small marsupials and birds that nest in similar places.

The ramification for tourism in Northern Australia are considerable – less native flora and fauna and visitors being regularly attacked and stung by aggressive bees.

Apis cerana has shown an ability to colonise and establish nests in a wide variety of locations and situations, including in vehicles, boats, containers and machinery. In addition, swarms can lodge temporarily in similar locations, enabling rapid dispersal over potentially long distances through movement of infested vehicles or materials.

It is noted that *Apis cerana* is a stinging bee and when cornered will attack. There is now clear evidence that the Asian bee displaces native bees from their natural habitats.

In the absence of eradication Industry requires a credible ongoing campaign to stop the spread of this dangerous environmental pest.

2) *Implementation of the More than Honey Report – The future of the Australian Honey Bee and Pollination Industries.*

This report was produced on a bipartisan basis and released in May 2008, despite 2 years passing by; very little, if any, work has been achieved to implement its goals. We would request that there be enhanced funding and enhanced implementation of the report and an allocated amount spent each year by the Commonwealth to see that its objectives are achieved.

3) *More research into pollination.*

The value of pollination to Australia and to the world food production suppliers is enormous. In Australia, more than \$1.8 billion in crops annually are pollinated by *Apis mellifera*. Countries which have experienced diseases, such as New Zealand and the United States have faced enormous challenges maintaining production in the face of honey bee diseases and pests. Continued research into honey bees and pollination is essential, not only for honey bees, but to the pollination industries that are dependent on bees to pollinate.

4) *Continued resource access for honey bees for pollination purposes.*

The industry continues to support an environmentally sustainable industry and therefore to maintain access to public land beekeepers continue to demonstrate their environmental credentials. Honey bees require continued access to public lands in order to maintain a viable pollination industry.

The above is an abbreviated text of the correspondence sent to all Federal Members of Parliament.