

Media Release

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Honey bee industry disappointed by inconclusive Varroa investigation

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) says the federal government's final report into the origin of the Varroa mite incursion fails to deliver the answers the industry has waited almost four years to receive.

The report into the investigation known as Operation Decker does not identify an entry pathway for the mite, does not determine when Varroa entered Australia and ultimately leaves the key question unanswered – how the incursion occurred.

AHBIC CEO Danny Le Feuvre said beekeepers across Australia are understandably frustrated by the outcome.

“Beekeepers have waited nearly four years for answers about how Varroa entered Australia. This report unfortunately fails to provide those answers,” Mr Le Feuvre said.

“The report confirms the investigation found no direct evidence of illegal importation and that digital and physical evidence was inconclusive. That means the pathway of entry for one of the world's most destructive bee pests remains unknown.”

Varroa destructor, the most damaging pest of honey bees globally, was first detected in sentinel hives at the Port of Newcastle in June 2022. A national eradication response was launched before the National Management Group determined in September 2023 that eradication was no longer technically feasible and the response transitioned to long-term management.

Australia has since moved from being Varroa-free to managing the pest permanently.

Mr Le Feuvre said the lack of a clearly identified entry pathway raises broader concerns for Australia's biosecurity system.

“If we do not understand how Varroa entered the country, it becomes far more difficult to ensure the same pathway cannot be exploited again,” he said.

“This matters not just for beekeepers but for every agricultural industry that relies on Australia's biosecurity protections.”





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The Australian honey bee industry produces around 37,000 tonnes of honey annually, generating approximately \$264 million in hive product value, while pollination services directly contribute an estimated \$4.6 billion to the national economy each year.

Mr Le Feuvre said beekeepers, queen breeders and pollination providers have carried the consequences of the incursion since 2022.

“For many in the industry this has been a devastating period. Colonies were destroyed, businesses disrupted and confidence in the biosecurity system shaken,” he said.

“The industry welcomed the investigation because we believed it would provide clarity. Instead, the final report confirms that the origin of the incursion remains unresolved.”

Recent reports of pyrethroid-resistant Varroa populations in Queensland and New South Wales highlight the ongoing challenges facing Australian beekeepers as they transition to managing the pest.

AHBIC is calling on the Federal Government to take further action to ensure the investigation leads to meaningful improvements in Australia’s biosecurity system.

The organisation is urging government to:

- Publish a comprehensive lessons-learned review identifying investigative gaps and biosecurity vulnerabilities.
- Update the current pathway analysis incorporating the investigation knowledge.
- Strengthen investigative capability for major biosecurity events.
- Support ongoing scientific investigation, including virus-origin research being undertaken by NSW DPIRD.

AHBIC also encouraged anyone with information about potential breaches of Australia’s biosecurity laws to contact the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry **REDLINE** reporting service on **1800 803 006**.

Government report can be found:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/about/reporting/obligations/government-responses/adequacy-australias-biosecurity-measures-response-preparedness-fmd-varroa-mite#varroa-mite-report>

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About AHBIC:

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council is the national peak body representing commercial and recreational beekeepers. AHBIC works to protect and promote the health, viability and sustainability of the honey bee and pollination industry in Australia.