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Industry steps up on Varroa response, but governments must now match the urgency

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) has acknowledged the constructive engagement of governments, industry and research partners through the National Emergency Honey Bee Industry Roundtable process, but says the outcomes of the Decision Makers Forum have fallen short of what is needed to address the escalating Varroa crisis.

The Decision Makers Forum followed a technical workshop involving government, industry, research and pollination sector representatives. That process gathered more than 55 proposed actions from industry and technical participants, stress-tested them against deliverability, impact and practicality, and consolidated them into 11 priority actions for decision-maker consideration.

AHBIC Chair Jon Lockwood said the process had been deliberately collaborative and solutions-focused.

“Industry came to this process in good faith. We brought the evidence, we brought practical solutions, and we worked constructively with governments and partners to turn a broad set of issues into a consolidated pathway for action,” Mr Lockwood said.

“These actions were not a wish list. They were a carefully developed, collaborative and consolidated pathway designed to protect commercial beekeeping capacity, pollination security and food production.”

The forum considered actions across immediate industry stabilisation, treatment access, beekeeper extension, pollination security, workforce, honey market integrity and research priorities.

AHBIC welcomed the commitments made by industry and research and development partners, including actions to improve national treatment coordination and pollination supply-and-demand forecasting.

However, AHBIC expressed disappointment that governments did not bring forward new activities or commitments equal to the scale of the crisis now facing the honey bee and pollination sectors.

“The hard reality is that the only genuinely new activities emerging from this process are those industry has agreed to lead, along with one action from the RDCs,” Mr Lockwood said.

“We acknowledge the engagement of governments and the time senior officials have given to this process. But engagement alone will not keep beekeeping businesses viable, hives alive or pollination services available for Australian agriculture.”

AHBIC said the current Varroa situation is no longer simply a beekeeping issue. Resistant Varroa has exposed a broader market failure, where commercial beekeepers are carrying the direct costs of protecting a pollination system that benefits agriculture, food supply chains, regional economies and consumers.

“Beekeepers are being asked to carry the cost of a national food production service,” Mr Lockwood said.



“The market has not yet adjusted, feral pollination is declining, treatment costs are increasing, and commercial beekeepers are under serious financial pressure. If governments wait for the market to correct this on its own, there is a real risk that critical pollination capacity will be lost before the system has time to adapt.”

AHBIC said the industry is not asking governments to replace the market or shield businesses from all adjustment. It is asking for targeted, practical and time-limited intervention where clear market failure exists.

Priority areas requiring government action include immediate treatment cost support, fit-for-purpose recovery finance, support for trusted extension services, temporary relief from public land apiary site fees, and stronger national coordination around lawful treatment access and regulatory pathways.

Mr Lockwood said governments still have an opportunity to respond.

“This is not about blame. It is about whether Australia is prepared to treat pollination as the critical agricultural input that it is,” he said.

“We are calling on governments to move quickly from observing the problem to acting on it. The window to stabilise commercial beekeeping capacity is narrow, and once skilled operators leave the industry, they cannot be replaced overnight.”

AHBIC will continue to progress the actions it has agreed to lead and will work with governments, RDCs, crop industries and state associations to maintain momentum.

An industry-facing outcomes report will be prepared following the Decision Makers Forum to provide transparency on the actions considered, the positions recorded and the next steps required.

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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

