



Submission on

**Senate Inquiry into the Future of Beekeeping and Pollination
Industries in Australia**

Due: 31 March 2014

Submitted to:

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
E: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Prepared by:

Ms Lucy Radzikowska, Wool & Beekeepers Executive Officer lucy@wafarmers.org.au
The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc)
Address: Ground Floor, 28 Thorogood Street, BURSWOOD WA 6100
Postal Address: PO Box 6291, EAST PERTH WA 6892
Phone: (08) 9486 2100; Facsimile: (08) 9361 3544

INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation. WAFarmers represents approximately 4,000 Western Australian farmers from primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers and beekeepers. Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental wellbeing of that land.

WAFarmers represents the majority of the Commercial Sector of the beekeeping industry in the State both in number of hives it represents and volume of honey. WAFarmers welcomes the opportunity to comment on the "Senate Inquiry into the Future of Beekeeping and Pollination Industries in Australia".

"The beekeeping industry is a small but important industry in the state contributing about \$7M directly into the economy from bee products. However, the full value of both managed and feral honey bees to the agricultural and horticultural industries in Western Australia has been estimated at \$89 million because many crops are dependent on bees for pollination" ¹ Department of Agriculture and Food WA 2014

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE PUBLIC INQUIRY

On 12 December 2013, the Senate moved that the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 26 March 2014. On 12 February 2014, the Senate granted an extension of time for reporting until 19 June 2014. Submissions were to be received by 31 March 2014.

The future of the beekeeping and pollination service industries in Australia, with particular reference to:

- a. the importance of these industries from a food security, environmental and financial point of view;
- b. current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally, and its future sustainability;
- c. the adequacy of the current biosecurity arrangements for imported and exported honey, apiary products, package bees and queen bees;
- d. Australia's food labelling requirements, and how these affect the beekeeping industry;
- e. the recommendations from the House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources 2008 report *More than Honey*; the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries, and the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee 2011 report *Science underpinning the inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee*; and
- f. any related matters."

This submission is made corresponding to the terms of reference as follows:

a. The importance of beekeeping and pollination industries from a food security, environmental and financial point of view;

1. There have been a number of inquiries into the bee industry, the most recent one "*More than Honey – the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries*" report of the inquiry into the future development of the Australian honey bee industry presented to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources released in 2008. WAFarmers fully supported the report. It is unfortunate that many of the recommendations remain un-actioned and this must be rectified as soon as possible.
2. It is a well-documented fact that the bee industry in pollination alone has a very big positive impact on the food that is produced in Australia. A report "*Pollination Aware: the Real Value of Pollination in Australia*" released in August 2010 captured the essence of the matter and should be considered in this inquiry.
3. There is a big opportunity for the beekeeping industry in Western Australia. The state is the only producer worldwide of Jarrah honey. Beekeepers also have the potential to produce highly valued Manuka honey.
4. From a financial point of view - without bees, there will be little to no pollination, without pollination the horticulture and agriculture industry in Australia will suffer greatly. One only has to look at some countries already having to manually apply pollen on fruit trees as there are no bees and those that are imported from countries such as Australia die off soon after arrival and in some cases before pollination of a crop is completed. Australia has a real opportunity not only from producing good quality food, but to provide viable bees for pollination to the rest of the world.

b. Current challenges facing the beekeeping industry domestically and internationally, and its future sustainability;

5. **Access and tenure of Apiary Sites** – Firstly, beekeepers need access to sites, secondly, they need security of tenure of the site. There are a number of permits issued for only 24 months which do not create a stable, sustainable environment on which to base a business on. Commercial beekeepers pay, in some cases, in excess of \$20,000 per year for site rentals which can be cancelled at any time. This is in contrast to pastoralists who pay a relatively small amount for a very large area with a lease of up to 50 years.
6. Large areas of Jarrah forest in WA are not accessible to beekeepers because of dieback quarantine; however, logging and numerous other activities do occur in those areas which have just as much risk in spreading the disease. There needs to be an equitable policy framework in place to ascertain risk and appropriate action.

7. A strong pollination industry relies on having a strong honey industry with access to viable sites for build-up (of bees) and honey production.
8. As production is limited to the number of sites available in the state, there is a high risk of more honey being imported into the country causing potential pest and disease incidences. Imported honey, in many cases does not meet the high quality assurance programs that Australian Beekeepers adhere to; residue levels of chemicals may also be present in imported products from other countries at levels not permitted in Australia.
9. **Access to public land** - The industry needs more access to all excluded public lands. A PhD study found that there were no adverse effects of managed bees in the environment.
10. **Appropriate State Government Policies** - The Victorian Government in 2013 released "Apiculture (Beekeeping) on public land policy" which stated
*"This policy and the associated standard operating procedure seek to:
Encourage apiculture on public land;*
 - *Maximise co-existence or minimise conflict between apiculture and other public land uses/values;*
 - *Establish an efficient, effective and uniform system for the management and administration of apiculture on public land; and*
 - *Ensure an appropriate financial return to the State from the use of a public resource."*
11. Beekeeping industry must be considered in regional and forest management plans; operational plans; and forest zoning plans (if applicable) in each State.
12. Clearing permits for the purpose of having a site need to be for the duration of the apiary site permit to (streamlining process and reducing red tape).
13. **Different Standards for local and imported products** - Some countries exporting honey into Australia do not meet the same Quality Assurance levels of beekeepers producing honey in Australia. Many countries exporting honey into Australia have chemical residue and contamination levels not accepted by Australian QA programs. Policies should be in place that ensure that all imported honey and related products into Australia have the same or higher Quality Assurance levels of beekeepers in Australia. This is from a fairness and human safety perspective.
14. Australia makes honey importation easy without providing adequate export opportunities for the industry. An industry that provides a clean green image and healthy bees. Honey should have been included in the Free Trade Agreement with Korea and we request that honey be included in future agreements. It would appear that Australian honey exports to South Korea have not been given the same trade terms as New Zealand. An inquiry into the topic should be undertaken.

- c. The adequacy of the current biosecurity arrangements for imported and exported honey, apiary products, package bees and queen bees;
15. There have been a number of government inquiries into the honey and pollination industries in Australia mentioned in this submission. The benefits to horticulture and agriculture both nationally and internationally are unquestionable. It is for this reason that it is hard to understand the Federal Government walking away from programs to safeguard the industry from possible pests and diseases.
16. A perfect example is the *Asian Honeybee* incursion in Australia whereby industry supported eradication due to the effect it would have on the industry. The Federal Government, through the cost-sharing agreement did not see much value in doing so. Every pest and disease allowed into Australia places a burden on the bee industry and has a negative flow on effect into industries that rely on pollination. The cost-sharing agreement between industry and government should be reviewed to enable Government to assist industry financially more than it has to date in such situations. The Federal Government should assist industry in eradicating Asian Honeybee without industry having to payback funding to do so as it is in the national interest to do so.
17. Australia is the only country in the world without the *Varroa mite*. The industry is too small to be able to levy itself to deal with such incidences should it decide to eradicate. Most discussion on the topic of pollination in Australia talks of "incidental pollination" by managed honeybees as if the hives are already in the horticultural areas collecting honey. This is not the case. Feral bees actually do a lot of the pollinating and these will be the first to disappear when *Varroa* arrives. It is very unlikely that the commercial industry in its present form and size would be able to do the same job purely from the fact that the industry is not large enough to handle such demand.
18. The Federal Government walking away from the bee industry is no more clear by the fact that the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council now calling on beekeepers to increase their honey levy to cater for some of the biosecurity measures that the Federal and State Government should be funding as a commitment to supporting the industry that supports the horticulture and agriculture industries.
19. WAFarmers questions the need to import breeding stock from overseas. WA commercial beekeepers have proven that the states stock is strong by having some of the highest average production per hive in Australia.
20. State biosecurity measures are inadequate. The States need to spend more money on biosecurity in the bee industry. Currently, in Western Australia beekeepers already levy themselves a fee-for-service to provide funding to the Department of Agriculture and Food WA for an enhanced pest and disease surveillance program. Industry should not have to be forced into a position where it does that. Biosecurity is the one basic area that Government should take responsibility for at border level while industry tackles their own hives.

d. Australia's food labelling requirements, and how these affect the beekeeping industry

21. Most Jarrah honey sold has an activity reading on the label stating how strong the antimicrobial activity of the honey is. This is also an indication of how pure the honey is vs blended cheaper honey with Jarrah honey to taste. The activity reading on Jarrah honey needs to be standardized and enforced.
22. WAFarmers supports "truth in labelling" and "country of origin" labelling. Current labelling regulations allow for the system to be abused providing opportunity to blend various honeys and cheating consumer into thinking that it is a pure product as per the label. This downgrades the product, consumer confidence and undermines the industry.

e. The recommendations from the House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources 2008 report More than Honey; the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries, and the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee 2011 report Science underpinning the inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee; and

23. Please refer to comments 1, 15 and 16 above in the submission.

f. Any related matters."

24. Bee industry bodies such as the Australian Honey Industry Council and its State Members such as WAFarmers should be provided with resources or funding for the support and guidance that they provide the State and Federal Government on matters such as this one.
25. Research organization, Rural Industries and Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) have been a great ally to the industry providing research and development programs. The organization does a good job in working with State and National bodies to ascertain its research needs and delivers every time. The research body needs to have continued funding from the Federal Government to ensure that this continues into the future.

End.