

## THE HONEY BEE INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA



Presentation

by Trevor Weatherhead, Executive Director,  
Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc.  
to the Neonicotinoids and Other Insecticides  
Research and Stewardship Symposium  
Canberra  
9 April, 2014

### Introduction of honey bees to Australia

- In 1810 Rev. Samuel Marsden brought two (2) hives from Rio de Janeiro and put them in the Governor's garden at Parramatta, Sydney, but they did not survive
- The first recorded surviving introduction was on 9 March, 1822 by Captain Wallis of the ship *Isabella* from Cork in Ireland
- These would have been the English black bee *Apis mellifera mellifera*

## Races of bees kept in Australia

- The Italian bees were first introduced into Australia in the 1860's and 1870's
- The caucasian bee was introduced into Australia in the 1880's
- The carniolan bee was introduced into Australia in the 1880's
- Other races tried but not established were Cyprian, punic, Spanish, cartpathian, Russian



## Latest statistics

State or Territory	No. of beekeepers	No. of hives
Queensland	3,098	100,939
New South Wales	3,461	214,296
Victoria	3,689	103,130
*Tasmania	182	16,361
South Australia	858	62,510
Western Australia	1,080	28,500
*Northern Territory	46	2,295
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>12,414</b>	<b>528,031</b>

\* Registration is not compulsory

There is no registration in the Australian Capital Territory

## Value of honey production

- The average annual production of honey in Australia is between 25,000 and 30,000 tonnes.
- Currently farm gate prices are between \$3.70 and \$4 per kilo
- So this puts the honey value at between \$90million and \$100million using 25,000 tonnes
- This year production will only be in the vicinity of 13,000 -14,000 tonnes



## Other apiary products

- Exports of live bees is estimated at around \$10million.
- This could be higher if the US market could be re-opened.
- Beeswax is a valuable by-product
- There is some pollen produced.
- There is no quantity of royal jelly, propolis or bee venom produced due to cheap import prices.



## Beekeeping Associations

- The Australia Honey Bee Industry Council Inc. (AHBIC) is the peak body in Australia. Its members are:-
- Queensland Beekeepers Association
- New South Wales Apiarists Association
- Victorian Apiarists Association
- Tasmanian Beekeepers Association
- South Australian Apiarists Association
- Western Australian Farmers Federation – Beekeepers Section
- Honey Packers and Marketers Association of Australia
- National Council of Pollination Associations
- Associate members
- There are many amateur associations in Australia

## Reliant industries

- The value of honey bee pollination to the agricultural and horticultural crops is estimated at between \$4 - \$6 billion annually
- The honey packing industry in Australia is an integral part of beekeeping
- The beekeeping equipment manufacturers



## Opportunities

- Pollination
- Export honey
- Live bees



## Pollination

- With Governments wanting to increase food production in Australia there is an opportunity for increased paid pollination
- If new growing areas are opened up then there will be a need for more beehives for pollination
- With the loss of feral hives to the small hive beetle there will be a bigger demand for paid pollination
- Expansion of areas planted to current crops such as almonds will mean more bee hives will be needed

## Export of honey

- With the world wanting green products Australia is in the box seat to supply honey
- There are some barriers such as tariffs
- Free Trade Agreements may also present greater opportunities although this did not happen with the FTA with South Korea

## Live bees

- The loss of bees in some countries presents opportunities for the export of live bees
- With spring in the northern hemisphere co-occurring with our autumn, this allows export opportunities
- Our quarantine breaches have stopped some exports
- Some overseas countries use non-tariff barriers to limit trade

## Threats

- Varroa mite
- Tropilaelaps mite
- Tracheal mite
- Loss of access to public lands
- Myrtle rust
- Asian bees
- Mislabelled products
- Pesticides



## Varroa mite

- Australia does not have the *Varroa destructor* mite
- If this mite came to Australia there would be an initial loss of hives
- The cost of pollination services would increase
- The need to treat hives would increase operational costs

## Tropilaelaps mite

- *Tropilaelaps clareae* and *T. mercedesae* are not in Australia
- Currently it is confined to Asia
- The effect of this mite is said to be worse than varroa
- As for varroa, pollination and operational costs would rise



## Tracheal mite

- *Acarapis woodi* is not currently in Australia
- Its effect would be the loss of hives and the need to treat the colonies
- Again operational and pollination costs would rise

## Loss of access to public lands

- There are moves to have beekeepers barred from certain public lands and this is the biggest threat to the beekeeping industry in Australia
- Traditionally beekeepers have had access to these public lands for well over 100 years
- The reasons are mostly ideological
- Without access to these lands for honey production and the ability to build hives before and after pollination beekeeping will change dramatically
- This will mean the loss of hives for pollination services

## Myrtle rust

- This is a recent addition to the Australian landscape
- It attacks plants in the Myrtaceae family
- This family is the main source of honey and pollen for honey bees
- If there are losses caused by this rust then the beekeeping industry will diminish in Australia

## Asian bees

- With the finding of the Asian bee *Apis cerana* Java genotype in Cairns in 2007 it has presented new problems
- The decision to stop the eradication program was ill conceived in the eyes of the industry
- It will present a reservoir of bees in Australia for *Varroa jacobsoni* to breed in should it find its way to mainland Australia
- It is currently being used as an excuse by the USA to not allow live bees in from Australia
- When it spreads Australia wide, which will be slow, it has the potential to cause as much environmental damage as the cane toad
- In north Queensland Asian bees are called cane toads with wings

## Mislabeled products

- In the last few years there have been two cases of products labeled honey being imported into Australia
- Testing by AHBIC from an overseas laboratory shows this to be not honey but corn syrup
- Attempts to have this product recalled from the market have been frustratingly slow
- This type of mislabeled product causes loss of income to the Australia industry and the public could reduce its consumption of real honey

## Pesticides

- Pesticides kill bees
- However in crops that many beekeepers pollinate there is a good relationship with the grower
- There are unfortunately rogue operators
- Also adherence to label directions is an area that needs urgent attention
- There are many unanswered questions on the effects of various insecticides and fungicides on honey bees



Thank you

