

# Quarantine and Biosecurity Review

Personal submission by Maxwell John Whitten - with special reference to commercial beekeeping and crop pollination in Australia

This submission broadly addresses the following four Terms of Reference

- animal and plant risk assessments
- the targets for quarantine intervention
- the mechanisms in place to respond to incursions, and
- the roles of the Australian, state and territory governments, and the wider community, and their relationships with each other.

## Background

Because my involvement with aspects of the 1996 Nairn Review is relevant to comments which follow, I state briefly the nature of my involvement in the earlier review.

During 1995, as Chief of CSIRO Division of Entomology, I made a number of public comments concerning the performance and capability of AQIS. Two major concerns were identified. The first addressed an overemphasis by AQIS on protecting meat export markets with inadequate attention given to plant and environmental protection. The second concern was more specific and provided a trigger for a response by the Commonwealth Government. It related to the sudden and significant loss of capability in plant quarantine following the voluntary early retirement of virtually the whole plant protection capability in AQIS. These concerns, published in the mainstream media, played a role in prompting the then Minister for Primary Industries, Senator Bob Collins, to establish the Nairn Enquiry.

The Academy of Science supplied a detailed submission to the Nairn Review. This submission was authored for the Academy by Dr Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe and myself. A perusal of the Nairn Report will indicate that a number of recommendations by the Academy were supported by the Nairn Review. In particular, we had recommended the establishment of a Statutory Authority to manage Australia's quarantine services, and that increased emphasis should be given to plant health matters - as well as enhanced protection of Australia's rich and unique biota from incursions of pests and diseases.

Since the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Nairn Review have never been documented, and since aspects of this story assume relevance to the current Beale Review, some key aspects of the story are recounted here.

In 1995 the Labor Government was imposing 'across the board' budgetary cuts on Commonwealth Departments and Agencies. AQIS (as well as CSIRO) was not exempt from these substantial financial cuts. AQIS management responsibly was intending to 'down size' in a balanced strategic manner - ie, attempting to minimise impact on key operational areas. However, the Staff Unions successfully insisted that voluntary early retirement be offered to all staff, regardless of impact on operational performance. It so happened that virtually all the plant health experts in AQIS availed themselves of the voluntary redundancy packages. This pending

loss of capability by AQIS in plant health matters and its implications were discussed informally between my officers (in CSIRO Entomology) and their counterparts in AQIS.

On my judgement, these concerns were published in The Australian under some such headline “CSIRO criticises AQIS”. The same day I received a phone call from Senator Bob Collins wanting more information and enquiring if I had discussed my concerns with Paul Hickey, the Director of AQIS. I replied “no” that I hadn’t but I advised the Minister that my information was based on extensive discussions between technical staff in AQIS and my scientists. In my view, any other action by me (within CSIRO or with senior management in AQIS) would have produced more talk but no action. Later the same day, I had a constructive conversation by phone with Paul Hickey explaining the basis of my concerns which he then reported back to his Minister.

Triggered by The Australian article, the AQIS criticisms were also aired the same day in the Senate, with Senator Ron Boswell raising concerns over quarantine, and making the obvious political mileage out of the situation. Not surprisingly, the Minister for Science, Senator Peter Cook, made his position on the matter perfectly clear to Dr Roy Green, the CEO of CSIRO. “Literally throwing ashtrays around his office” was how the situation was described to me by Roy Green, with the Minister enquiring if “Max Whitten could be sacked”. That didn’t happen, and the progress towards a comprehensive enquiry into AQIS was now irreversibly under way.

There is one further point worth making about the establishment of the Nairn Review. John Anderson, Shadow Minister for Primary Industries, during a National Press Club talk just prior to the 1996 Federal election, committed the incoming Howard Government to the Nairn Review but, on my recommendation, had agreed to expand the Review Team to include a plant protection expert. However, some three days after the election and the appointment of John Anderson as Minister for Primary Industries in John Howard’s new Government, I got a call from Stephen Oxley, a senior advisor to Minister Anderson, to say that his Minister had spoken with AQIS and was no longer convinced that recruiting a plant protection expert to work with Professor Nairn was warranted. My brief reply was that I thought it would have taken the bureaucracy three years, and not three days, to exert that level of influence over the Minister. I reiterated my reasons for appointing a plant protection expert to the Nairn team and, further, I suggested that a suitable person would be Dr Peter Allen, an entomologist with the South Australian Dept of Agriculture. Much to the initial chagrin of Professor Nairn, Dr Allen was appointed to the Nairn Team. They formed an effective professional duo, with Nairn covering animal health issues and Allen plant health concerns.

Without doubt, Australia has benefited from the reforms triggered by the Nairn Review, despite the fact that many recommendations were not adequately implemented – a point well made by the NSW Farmers Association in their 2006 report “Crisis in Competence in Quarantine”.

Unfortunately, the case for a review of AQIS is even more necessary in 2008 than it was in 1995, though the circumstances now are quite different and more complex. Some may well argue that the set of events described above that triggered the Nairn Review was not a very civilised or sensible way to achieve an outcome that was in the public good. But consider some of the alternatives: the leaking of an internal Customs report on security problems at Sydney airport with Allan Kessing receiving a suspended gaol sentence (we return to this matter below)? That action, whether by Kessing or others, led to a \$200 million upgrade of security at Australian airports which presumably is benefiting someone out there. Perhaps, an equine influenza outbreak or some other major quarantine breakdown is a preferred route to triggering

some remedial action? The reality is that no pathway to address quarantine deficiencies is without difficulties and angst.

For a number of reasons, the particular circumstances surrounding the establishment and functioning of the Nairn Inquiry are unlikely to find repetition in today's public service after ten years of Howard Government. But unorthodoxy and a disregard for undue bureaucratic processes that border on humbug, can sometimes lead to useful outcomes – eg the reforms initiated by the Nairn Inquiry.

Having a former career bureaucrat head the current inquiry provides food for thought. In fairness, the Issues Paper lists a large number of bureaucratic challenges that need serious consideration. An experienced bureaucrat is likely to be able to cut to the chase on these complex inter-organisational matters at Federal and State levels which are amply described in the Issues Paper. However, there are three levels of operation which also need to be addressed. Firstly, are systems in place to ensure that the right job is done first time round. Secondly, in those instances where the job was not done correctly, are procedures adequate to learn from the failures. And, thirdly, if problems persist which in the view of an officer threaten the public good, are there effective and safe avenues open to the concerned officer to seek some external remedy. In other words, can a whistleblower act without fear of reprisal. As explained later in this submission, there exists a culture in AQIS which tends to prevent that from happening. I am doubtful if this Inquiry will address adequately the 'culture' problems which appear to exist within AQIS and some other Agencies. For example, will opportunity be provided for operational AQIS officers, present or past, to tell their story? Some of the 'culture' problems are raised in this submission.

## Quarantine and Biosecurity problems – a beekeeping industry perspective

I have elected to use several concerns facing the commercial beekeeping industry to illustrate deficiencies in Australia's current quarantine and biosecurity capability. While Australia's commercial beekeeping industry is small (honey and other honeybee products are around \$70million pa), the industry plays a more important strategic role in providing pollination services to a wide range of primary producers in horticulture, field crops and pastures with a combined value of over \$2billion pa.

The Australian beekeeping industry featured prominently in a recent inquiry conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry called "Inquiry into Rural Skills, Training and Research". This wider inquiry, in turn, led to a specific honeybee inquiry called "Inquiry into the Future Development of the Australian Honey Bee Industry". Following the March 2008 Federal election, the honeybee inquiry has been reconvened by the Rudd Labor Government. It has yet to complete its study and report back to the Parliament. High amongst the issues that it is considering is quarantine and biosecurity - in particular:

- the future of the Eastern Creek Honeybee Quarantine Facility and
- border protection against incursion, spread and establishment of pests and diseases of the European Honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. Of special concern is the mite *Varroa destructor*.

The comments that follow are my personal comments; but they stem from a long association with the commercial beekeeping sector, either as Chief of CSIRO Entomology, or as inaugural Chairman of the Honey Bee R&D Council. I also have a current interest in assisting the honey producing industry to focus on providing effective pollination services for those primary producers who depend on, or will benefit from, effective honeybee pollination of their crops. The formation of a new industry body, called Pollination Australia, which recognises the critical strategic importance of honeybees in crop pollination is largely driven by quarantine and biosecurity concerns - in particular, the likely and probably inevitable entry into Australia of *Varroa destructor*, an ectoparasite which has spread around the globe with often devastating effects on agricultural industries. In July 2007, Minister Peter McGauran provided \$300,000 to be administered by the Rural Industries R&D Corporation to assist the beekeeping industry work with those industries dependent on honeybee pollination to develop Pollination Australia as a vehicle for ensuring effective pollination services are developed and sustained in Australia. The establishment of Pollination Australia is a work in progress. *Varroa destructor* is seen as the major biosecurity threat to the achievement of these objectives, but has also served as a primary trigger for the Pollination Australia initiative.

### The pending closure of the Eastern Creek Quarantine Facility

In the late 1970's as Professor of Genetics, University of Melbourne, I provided *pro bono* assistance to the Federal Council of Australian Apiarists' Associations (FCAAA) by preparing a case for consideration by the Commonwealth Public Works Committee. The FCAAA was requesting the Commonwealth Government to construct a suitable honeybee quarantine facility at Eastern Creek, west of Sydney. The case was favourably received and the Honeybee Quarantine Facility became operational around 1980, providing valuable service to commercial beekeepers for the past 27 years.

In 2001 AQIS, on instructions from the Dept of Finance, sold the Eastern Creek Quarantine Facilities, including the Honeybee Facility. Conditions of the sale included lease-back arrangements for AQIS until 2010 with an option to extend until 2015 if both parties agree. To my knowledge, no plausible rationale for the sale of a specialised purpose-built facility such as the Eastern Creek Quarantine Centre - as it transpires for a pittance - was ever advanced by Senator Nick Minchin, the relevant Minister for Finance. Even privatisation of quarantine services for particular animal introductions like horses, cats and dogs where there might well be a prospect for safe and profitable commercialisation of a quarantine service, should not have been contemplated until new arrangements had been at least identified, if not put in place. No doubt the status of alternative arrangements for the wider range of plant and animal quarantine services will be considered in detail by the Beale Review. My focus is on the honeybee quarantine facility at Eastern Creek and what lies beyond 2010 or 2015.

In the case of honeybees, where no one is even attempting to suggest privatisation of quarantine arrangements for imported honeybee stock, it was a foolish decision to commit to decommissioning this facility by 2015, and possibly as early as 2010. Despite assurances made publicly by Minister McGauran (eg at the Victorian Apiarists Association Annual Conference on 5 July 2007) that the Eastern Creek Honeybee Facility would not close until alternative and adequate facilities had been provided, there was no convincing evidence during 2007 that AQIS was in serious discussions with other government agencies, such as NSW Dept of Primary Industries, to host replacement facilities.

The sale of the Eastern Creek Quarantine Facilities under the circumstances described above, well below any likely replacement costs, and seemingly driven by some broad privatisation ideology, beggars belief. However, it is important that the Australian Government recognises the urgent need for a replacement honeybee quarantine facility. And, therefore, I fully support the recommendation by AHBIC (the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council) in its submission to this Review relating to a new honeybee quarantine facility to be constructed and commissioned before the current facility is decommissioned. .

**Recommendation 1: I strongly support the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council recommendation which states: “AHBIC is of the view that the maintenance of a suitable quarantine facility for the imports of queen bees is essential, firstly, as a barrier to the incursion of pests and diseases and secondly, as a demonstration of the national commitment to the biosecurity of key industries. Consistent with this view AHBIC believes that the Commonwealth progress without delay an invitation to the NSW DPI to establish a queen bee quarantine facility at EMAI [Elizabeth McArthur Agricultural Institute]. AHBIC believes that AQIS should provide financial support of the order of \$25,000 per annum to maintain such a facility.”**

## Border Protection Problems and the Fragile ‘Continuum’.

Honey production and vast bulk of pollination services, both paid and incidental, depend on the exotic honeybee, *Apis mellifera* introduced into Australia around 1820. Although the industry has, in recent years, been harmed by incursions of exotic diseases (eg Chalkbrood) and pests (eg the small hive beetle) Australia still remains free of other important diseases and pests (eg various mites spp and nuisance pollinators/pest vectors such as *Apis cerana* and *A dorsata*).

Commercial beekeeping in Australia continues to face real threats from exotic pests and diseases, foremost of which is the mite, *Varroa destructor*. This ectoparasite may enter Australia on its traditional host, *A cerana* but it is more likely to gain access by boat in a swarm of *A mellifera*. It is generally argued, based on the rapid spread of *Varroa* around the globe in recent years, that its entry into Australia is more a question of *when* and not *if*. *Varroa* entered the north island of NZ in 2001 and, despite concerted quarantine and surveillance efforts, it entered and established in the south island in 2006. *A. cerana*, the Asian honeybee which is the traditional host of *Varroa spp* has been detected at Australian borders on a number of occasions but, to date has failed to establish in this country. The most recent known quarantine breach of *A. cerana* was at the port of Cairns in May 2007. How it was discovered, and what steps were taken to find and destroy any derivative colonies, illustrates that our quarantine arrangements are not adequate. Similarly, the detection of two swarms of *A mellifera* at the port of Brisbane in March 2007, also reveal problems with our response to possible quarantine breaches.

Attachment 1 is an extract of the Proof Copy of the Transcript of the Public Hearing by the House of Representatives Honeybee Inquiry on 10 August 2007. It would be instructive for the Beale Review to study the full transcript, and talk with the Committee, to determine what lessons might be learned from the incidents referred to in the previous paragraph.

To illustrate how things don’t necessarily run to plan in real life, here is an extract from the Brisbane Public Hearing (see Attachment 1 for more details). Mr Dick Adams MP, at the time, was Deputy Chair of the Inquiry. Mr Rex Carruthers was Deputy President of the Queensland Beekeepers Association. Mr Alby Schultz MP was Chair of the Inquiry Committee. Mr Gavin

O'Connor was a member of the Committee With the new Government, Mr Schultz and Mr Adams have exchanged roles on the Committee. The dialogue between Committee members and Mr Carruthers relates to the *A cerana* incursion at the port of Cairns in May 2007, and to subsequent events after the quarantine breach was detected. The concept of quarantine and a biosecurity continuum is clearly a serious casualty in this instance.

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**Mr ADAMS**—Does anybody else wish to add something? What about the issue of not being ready when we discover these nuisance swarms? I have been told some stories about swarms showing up. Maybe you would like to tell us the story of what happened in Cairns. Were we sufficiently ready to deal with that issue? Was it dealt with in a manner that is sufficient for this industry to continue in its present form?

**Mr Carruthers**—I will run through the chain of events associated with this incursion. I got a phone call on the Friday morning [11 May 2007] from the beekeeper called to move a swarm of bees from the boat mast. It was the Friday prior to the long weekend in May. The beekeeper had some experience with Asian honey bees, so we were very fortunate in that sense. Of course, a beekeeper's identification of a pest is not sufficient to make a ruling on that pest. I was notified at 10 o'clock on the Friday morning that there was a possible incursion of *apis cerana* in Cairns. I actually found out that it had been positively identified from Trevor Monson [a beekeeper] in Victoria, who read the newspaper the next morning. At the time I was state president, but I was not notified that those bees were positively identified until the Monday morning of the long weekend. Being a long weekend, there was nothing done on the Monday. The wheels were set in motion on the Tuesday. The hive of bees in the boat mast was fairly small but, nevertheless, still alive. There are a set of circumstances that create a problem in the sense that AQIS look after the actual port facility but, once a swarm has gone out of that area, it is the responsibility of DPIF.

**CHAIR**—Are you saying there is a demarcation problem?

**Mr Carruthers**—There is.

**CHAIR**—Goodness me!

**Mr Carruthers**—If it is on the wrong side of the fence, it is no longer AQIS's responsibility.

**CHAIR**—It is the responsibility of the other department?

**Mr Carruthers**—Yes. So we do have that problem where the responsibility is moved from one department to another. Once the hive is out in the general public—once it has moved from the port—it is, as in this case, called a nuisance swarm. That is what happened with these bees. Even though it was in a high-risk area—what we would all assume would be a high-risk area because it was within 250 metres of the port—it was still classified as a nuisance beehive. An electrician trying to rewire the mast rang the department and he was put onto the beekeeper—he was either put onto the beekeeper or he was given his name and phone number—to sort the mess out so that he could rewire the boat mast.

**Mr ADAMS**—We are on the verge of having a major pest entering Australia which could wipe out this industry, or a major part of it—change the whole structure of pollination and destroy some industries—but we do not have a task force which would contact the Queensland Beekeepers Association and say, ‘We’ve discovered some Asian bees in Cairns. We want to let you know so you can notify your membership.’ There is no structure like that set up? The departments do not have a structure whereby they are talking to each other?

**Mr Carruthers**—They do, but to get that implemented, it all seems to be back to front. It was actually the beekeeping industry that rang the alarm bells in this case. In most cases that is the way it happens.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that we have government departments on our borders, who have a responsibility for protecting our borders, creating problems because of demarcation lines, where a bee flies from one side of the line to the other? We have a situation where we have a nine to five mentality and we do not work on public holidays, so the person who identifies the hive—in this case, an electrician—is then, through the department, put in touch with a beekeeper, who is then asked to come and do the work that is the responsibility of the quarantine people and the border protection people. Did the beekeeper get paid by the government for doing the work?

**Mr Carruthers**—No.

**CHAIR**—That is just outrageous. It is a clear indication of why we have to do something very quickly to tighten up all of our procedures across this country. I think that is just outrageous. You can rest assured I will be taking it up with the minister outside of the committee.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—Does the industry liaise with port owners in Queensland? What initiatives have been taken by your association to get a protocol in place?

**Mr Carruthers**—Our industry approached AQIS with regard to getting to know the people on the waterfront. We had a swarm detected at Fisherman’s Island. We wanted to show our appreciation to the waterfront workers for their vigilance by giving them some honey. That was almost impossible to do because of security issues. That, of course, has been compounded since 9/11.

**CHAIR**—At least that side of our security is working.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—I think there are some fairly simple measures that could be undertaken there, with people of goodwill, to up the surveillance potential in the ports. That ought to be something that we can look at in the context of the recommendations.

Earlier at the same Public Hearing, the following exchange took place between myself and Committee members:

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—Thank you for all that framework that you have given the committee on how you see this might proceed. My question is: are we moving quickly enough in this area? There seems to be a degree of urgency about getting these frameworks and structures in place, given the dimensions of the threat.

**Dr Whitten**—Firstly, I hope the committee reaches its conclusions and puts out a report as soon as possible, because there is an urgency. Varroa is on the doorstep and I do not believe we are going to stop it, and, indeed, that is an issue that I would like to see raised. I have put it in my recommendations. Probably I can be a bit more frank than others, because they have to think of the ramifications once they go outside this room, but you know the old Arab saying, ‘He who speaks the truth has one foot in the stirrup’? I can, on the basis of that, say that our current preparedness is grossly inadequate in Australia.

So that you really understand what happens with the Asian honey bee situation: when a colony was detected like it was in Cairns, the electrician and the owner rang up the department, to be told, ‘Go find a beekeeper,’ or, ‘Here’s the name of a beekeeper to remove that,’ because it was a nuisance hive. Luckily, that beekeeper was able to identify that it was the Asian honey bee. It was then a long weekend. You can talk to people here who were directly involved in that process. There was no preparedness. Nobody knew how to control that swarm. Nobody knew what to do with the material: where it was to go; how it was to be analysed. There were turf wars within the department here over advice from one part of the department to the other. AQIS at the time did not want to know about it because they regarded it as a post-entry issue and not their concern.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—Dr Whitten, what you are saying is that we have a \$60 million industry, an industry downstream to the value of some \$4 billion, an imminent threat to the livelihood of producers in that industry directly, and we are hopelessly—that is what I am hearing from what you are saying—unprepared for this contingency.

**Dr Whitten**—Yes. I will make two comments on that. The Asian honey bee I think was a minor risk compared to the European honey bee, and there are examples of detections of swarms in the Port of Brisbane where it was assumed that they came from local hives. If the mite is going to come into Australia it is likely to come in on the European honey bee. The empirical evidence is that we are not well prepared. Worse still, you will not get, I believe, honest and open advice from any of those organisations. You may remember recently the experience of Allan Kessing. There is no adequate whistleblower legislation at the Commonwealth level. I can give you more specific examples of the unlikelihood that you will get adequate information to tell you how bad that situation is.



The events following the detection of *A cerana* at the port in Cairns in May 2007 indicated institutional weaknesses within AQIS, the Queensland Dept of Primary Industry, and to a lesser extent in CSIRO. At the coal face in QDPI and CSIRO, the performance by the relevant officers was exemplary; but, higher up, within and between QDPI, AQIS and CSIRO, it was a different matter. The Cairns incident also brought to light issues of concern relating to two swarms of *A. mellifera* in the port of Brisbane during March 2007 which could have resulted in major injury to Australia’s primary industries if they had originated overseas and not from local colonies.

The mis-used and much abused term ‘biosecurity’ is supposed to emphasise the continuum between pre-border and border protection (ie quarantine) and post-border management issues, as explained in the Issues Paper. However, the above extract from the Honeybee Inquiry left

the distinct impression with the Committee that any notion of the biosecurity continuum was illusory.

Valuable lessons can be learned from the Cairns and Brisbane incidents which, fortunately did not result in any damage to commercial beekeeping or pollination services. Indeed, these incidents could be viewed as a *'felix culpa'*, out of which we could derive benefit. But this will only happen if key participants such as Rex Carruthers and Dr Denis Anderson are allowed to recount exactly to the appropriate audience what happened in the days and weeks after 11 May 2007.

Between May and July 2007 I raised some of these issues with Minister Peter McGauran. Aspects of those exchanges are dealt with in the next section. They reveal a culture of non-disclosure which could mean that a Minister is unlikely to receive timely and fulsome advice, sufficient to make informed decisions.

**Recommendation 2. A detailed study of the response to the incursion of *Apis cerana* into Cairns in May 2007, and swarms of *Apis mellifera* at the port of Brisbane in March 2007, should be undertaken so that valuable lessons can be learned from these events.**

Institutional Responses to Unwelcome News: the need for Whistleblower Legislation.

What avenues are open to public servants if, in the course of their duties, they encounter problems which may reflect poorly on their superiors or their organisation but which, in their view, will harm the public interest if not corrected? Salutory lessons come from the celebrated case of the Customs Officer, Allan Kessing, now classified as a convicted criminal who received a suspended jail sentence for supposedly leaking a report he authored about deficiencies in security at Sydney Airport. An informative discussion on the Kessing affair took place on SBS Insight Program (27 September 2007). For a transcript of the Insight Program see: [http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/strictly\\_confidential\\_information\\_secretcy\\_and\\_government\\_131480](http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/strictly_confidential_information_secretcy_and_government_131480)

A careful read of the full transcript is instructive and has certain relevance to the AQIS enquiry. Here are some highlights:

**“REPORTER: Amanda Collinge**

**Allan Kessing is a former public servant, he is also a convicted criminal, his crime, whistleblowing, in this case leaking confidential Customs reports to a newspaper. In June this year, Kessing narrowly escaped jail and received a 9-month suspended sentence.**

*ALLAN KESSING: Easy target. Since I was the author of the reports they assume, perhaps, that I was the disgruntled one.*

**These days Kessing is camping out in some chaos in a mountain shack with plans for his dream house on hold. Kessing maintains his innocence and says he did not leak the reports but he did write them. He says Customs buried his reports for 2.5 years because they were so embarrassing to management, and ultimately to government.**

*ALLAN KESSING: Even the management of Customs didn't get to see these reports, as was made clear during the trial. They brought up six or seven of the top managers, the border protection manager, the drug strategy manager, passenger processing managers and they all swore on oath that they were unaware of the existence of these reports until they were leaked to the media.*

**Because Allan Kessing's reports were finally leaked to the media, we now know what they contained. Kessing and his unit uncovered major security breaches at Sydney Airport, including security guards with criminal records being employed as baggage handlers, and stealing and drug smuggling involving security screeners and cleaners.**

*ALLAN KESSING: We had illegal immigrants, we had people with criminal convictions, we had some people who couldn't be documented on any database whatsoever, they weren't on the electoral roll, they didn't have driver's licences and yet they were working so-called security in the sterile area of Sydney Airport.*

**The revelations were explosive and once made public, the Government moved swiftly to set up a major review of security at airports. This in turn led to a \$200 million security upgrade. At the same time, the Australian Federal Police moved swiftly against Kessing.**

*ALLAN KESSING: They spent an hour and a half here, supposedly, searching.*

**Kessing says the police raided his house twice and placed him under surveillance.**

*ALLAN KESSING: They were tapping my phones, they stated and they produced records to show that they were tapping my computer as well. At the trial, they produced something like 400 pages of my ISP addresses.*

**After two years of investigation, police charged Kessing under the Federal Crimes Act and brought him to trial. The law states that Commonwealth public servants who release official information without permission can face up to two years jail.**

*ALLAN KESSING: Well, I think it's outrageous. I mean, surely there's a constitutional point here that government should not be able to make laws which are against the public interest. Now, I'm fully in favour of there being laws for security and the disclosure of information, absolutely, but not information that is in the public interest.*

**Allan Kessing's life has been on hold for the last two years. His dream home remains unfinished and his superannuation package badly depleted with the legal costs of his court case.**

*ALLAN KESSING: My retirement has been shot to pieces. I haven't been able to get on... carry on with the building project I had here. And it's taken well over \$50,000 of my \$70,000 superannuation, so it's been pretty devastating.*

**It's clear that Kessing's conviction was intended as a warning to other public servants.**

*ALLAN KESSING: The Crown prosecutor, Lincoln Crowley, made that very clear. He said a custodial sentence is indicated as a specific warning to other public servants. You can't get*

*much clearer than that. It was to discourage other public servants from doing something in the public interest.*

**REPORTER: And do you think it will have that effect?**

*ALLAN KESSING: It clearly has had that effect. There's been something approaching a reign of terror in my old department. Colleagues tell me, or ex-colleagues tell me that it's become almost a byword now, you know - keep your mouth shut about that or you'll end up like Kessing.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Well, welcome everybody. Thanks very much for joining us. And thank you for joining us, Allan Kessing. I notice you've had a shave since a week ago. The leaking of those reports of yours led to a \$200 million upgrade of airport security. Was that taken into account at your trial?**

*ALLAN KESSING: No, the judge specifically told the jury that they were not to take any public interest into account in deciding the case, and to be honest, it was not actually mentioned in the trial because the trial was not about what was leaked or what was supposedly not leaked, or the public interest or anything else. The trial was specifically about was I, as a retired officer, guilty of releasing information. They didn't specify what information, they didn't specify how it was leaked or to whom or to anything else.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: What's your next move? Because you're maintaining your innocence in this.**

*ALLAN KESSING: Absolutely.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: What is your next move?**

*ALLAN KESSING: Well, I'm appealing the conviction, obviously.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Peter Lowe, you're Allan Kessing's defence lawyer. Did you expect the public interest in this case to win out?**

*PETER LOWE, BARRISTER: The trial judge took the view that there was no whistleblower defence open on the evidence. That is that there was... the disclosure of the reports could not possibly be in the public interest. Taking that view literally means that the public has no general right to know about airline security issues or that criminal conduct had been disclosed as part of the investigation carried out by Allan in his report. Consequently, that there was also no public interest, or no entitlement of the public to know, that the Customs Service had sat on this information for two...more than two years, and they were only prompted to do anything after the disclosure of the reports. There is no general whistleblower protections available to Commonwealth public servants, either serving or in the past, and this case highlights the need to do something in that regard.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Roger Beale, you've worked as a department head and as a senior public servant in the Howard Government. What do you think about this situation? I mean, isn't there a clear public interest in the leaking of those reports? Aren't we safer as a result?**

**ROGER BEALE, FORMER DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARY:** *Jenny, I have no knowledge of the case in any detailed sense at all, only what I've read in the newspapers, so I don't know whether those connections actually factually exist and I don't want to comment on it.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** **OK, tell me what you think about a situation like that. If you don't want to talk about this case, what do you think...**

**ROGER BEALE:** *Let me just give you a practical example. I, as a secretary, have on a number of occasions had to call in the AFP when information has been leaked from the department. Now, why have I done that? Well, one of those examples involved some important and significant international negotiations. Quite clearly somebody in the department had a view that the whole of government position taken by Australia wasn't environmentally friendly enough and wanted that out in the public arena. Now, that had two effects. First of all it diminishes your capacity to negotiate effectively for the country. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it creates mistrust of the department as a source of advice and as a custodian of information.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** **Do you think a public servant has the right to leak something if they feel they're not getting action within the system on something that is a matter of public safety or... as Allan has.**

**ROGER BEALE:** *There is no such right, and I think courts have upheld that view in a number of cases. I would, however, say that it's important that if they've got concerns, that they take it to their secretary or to the controller-general and ask why action hasn't been taken. And if they're still not happy, that they take the opportunity of going to either the head of the Prime Minister's Department or the Public Service Commissioner Etc etc."*

So there you have it! No Commonwealth whistleblower legislation worth a crumpet. A culture of fear and intimidation. Public interest of little relevance. Corporate image paramount. A public servant held out to dry – as an example to others not to step out of line. The following sequence of events should therefore come as no surprise.

In May 2007, I was kept informed by Rex Carruthers (the then President of the Queensland Beekeepers Association) and Dr Denis Anderson (without doubt the world's leading authority on both *A. cerana* and *Varroa destructor*) of the response deficiencies after the detection of *A. cerana* at the port of Brisbane. I emailed Minister McGauran expressing my concerns and suggested that he ask his newly appointed AQIS quarantine advisor (a veterinarian who was also a noted amateur beekeeper) to contact me and I would give him contact details for those persons who were intimately involved in dealing with the incursion. This way, the Minister would be guaranteed first-hand, authoritative and timely advice about the difficulties being encountered. I was promptly contacted, and gave the Minister's advisor the names of Rex Carruthers and Denis Anderson. He agreed to get an appropriate briefing for the Minister.

Some three weeks later I was surprised to learn from Carruthers and Anderson that no approach had been made to them for a briefing. In a follow-up email to the Minister's Quarantine advisor on 1 June 2007 I said the following "*I have some difficulty in understanding how Minister McGauran could be adequately informed about these matters without a knowledge of what actually went wrong and what needs to be done to protect the beekeeping industry and the wider agricultural community that depends on honeybee pollination services.*"

The matter rested there until the Minister opened the Victorian Apiarist's Annual Conference on 5 July 2007. He addressed publicly the quarantine concerns I had raised with him. He stated that he had followed up the Cairns *A. cerana* incursion with AQIS but had been assured that there were no problems. He also reaffirmed the Government's commitment to a replacement quarantine facility before Eastern Creek was decommissioned.

Later that day the Minister and I discussed the AQIS advice. I indicated that it was quite inadequate, a response that did not surprise the Minister. The Minister said that his advisor was sensitive to the fact that he had not approached Carruthers or Anderson for information about the Cairns incident. I am not in the slightest critical of the actions of the Minister's advisor but I believe strong criticism of AQIS is justified for creating a culture where even a Minister's advisor is reticent to collect and convey to his Minister information which is essential to informed decision making. I observed to the Minister that Ministerial advisors are often seconded for brief terms with the Minister and are then expected to live with the consequences of unpopular advice when they return to normal Departmental duties. I pointed out that, unlike some States such as QLD, there is no commonwealth whistleblower legislation which protects a public servant from speaking out, other than to a more senior officer within the same Department.

This is where the Kessing affair becomes relevant. Allan Kessing argued *"Now, I'm fully in favour of there being laws for security and the disclosure of information, absolutely, but not information that is in the public interest."*

The counter view put by Roger Beale on Insight was *"There is no such right, and I think courts have upheld that view in a number of cases. I would, however, say that it's important that if they've got concerns, that they take it to their secretary or to the controller-general and ask why action hasn't been taken. And if they're still not happy, that they take the opportunity of going to either the head of the Prime Minister's Department or the Public Service Commissioner."*

Which view best serves the public interest?.

Kessing argues that his treatment *"was designed to discourage other public servants from doing something in the public interest. ...It clearly has had that effect. There's been something approaching a reign of terror in my old department. Colleagues tell me, or ex-colleagues tell me that it's become almost a byword now, you know - keep your mouth shut about that or you'll end up like Kessing."*

Of course there is a bigger issue here that goes beyond quarantine and biosecurity. No one is arguing for public servants to freely in disclose information without authorisation. But when it comes to matters of substantial public interest there has to be some civilised pathway open to an officer who feels that wider disclosure is in the public interest. Even with the best whistleblower legislation protection the whistleblower is likely to be on a 'hiding to nothing'. But at least they would escape the harsh treatment meted out to Allan Kessing.

By way of contrast, consider the case of Ms Toni Hoffman, the nurse in charge of Bundaberg Base Hospital's Intensive Care Unit. Although QLD does have reasonably robust whistleblower legislation, she risked her job by secretly expressing her concerns about Dr Patel's botched surgery to State MP Rob Messenger and The Australian on 28 June 2007. As noted in The Australian "An inquiry headed by retired Supreme Court justice Geoff Davies QC, found that Ms Hoffman was heroic for repeatedly trying to do something about Dr Patel." Ms Hoffman in

June 2007 was made a Member of the Order of Australia. In that same month, Allan Kessing became a convicted criminal for providing a similar public service to the community. Also, in the same month, the Minister for Primary Industries was kept in the dark about deficiencies in border security - presumably because it was not in the interests of AQIS to provide him with timely and fair advice.

Peter Lowe, the barrister acting for Allan Kessing had this to say *“There is no general whistleblower protections available to Commonwealth public servants, either serving or in the past, and this case highlights the need to do something in that regard.”*

This assessment brings me to the final point I wish to make. In the recent past an officer in AQIS had become concerned about quarantine lapses in the workplace. This led the officer to read the Nairn Report which in turn led to the Academy submission by Tyndale-Biscoe and myself. After some discussion with the officer Tyndale-Biscoe and I formed the view that there was little we could do about what appeared to be *prima facie* grounds for remedial action. The reason for this inaction was the certain risk of prosecution of the officer, a position made clear by the above statement from Peter Lowe. Even to identify the location or the nature of the officer's concerns could lead to consequences similar or more severe than experienced by Allan Kessing. There must be a better way to deal with such situations which threaten the public interest.

The creation of appropriate commonwealth whistleblower legislation would help address this problem by providing a better balance between confidentiality and the disclosure of information which serves the public interest. Also, the creation of a genuinely independent office, similar to the Ombudsman Office, where concerned officers could seek advice, would be a more effective remedy than that suggested by Roger Beale on the SBS Insight programme.

What may be required is a more independent inquiry, at arm's length from the bureaucracy such that the bureaucracy is not effectively examining its own performance but one where public servants can speak freely without fear of retaliation if they have a story to tell. Early in the term of a new Government would seem preferable for such an exercise.

**Recommendation 3. The Review should recognise that a culture has developed in AQIS which appears to put its corporate reputation above its responsibility to the national interest in quarantine and biosecurity. To the extent that this criticism is valid, the Review should suggest remedies.**

Appendix 1



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND  
FORESTRY

**Reference: Future development of the Australian honey bee industry**

FRIDAY, 10 AUGUST 2007

BRISBANE

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY**

**Friday, 10 August 2007**

**Members:** Mr Schultz (*Chair*), Mr Adams (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest, Mrs Mirabella, Mr Gavan O'Connor, Mr Secker, Mr Tuckey and Mr Windsor

**Members in attendance:** Mr Adams, Mr Gavan O'Connor and Mr Schultz

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Honey bee industry in terms of:

1. Its current and future prospects.
2. Its role in agriculture and forestry.
3. Biosecurity issues.
4. Trade issues.
5. The impact of land management and bushfires.
6. The research and development needs of the industry.
7. Existing industry and Government work that has been undertaken for the honey bee industry.

**WITNESSES**

<b>BARNES, Mr Peter Roy, Wide Bay Branch Representative, Queensland Beekeepers Association.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>BARNES, Mr Roy Owen, Private capacity.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>BRADFORD, Mr Neville Terence, Executive Member, Brisbane Branch Representative, Queensland Beekeepers Association .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CARRUTHERS, Mr Rex, Vice-President, Queensland Beekeepers Association .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>DEWAR, Mrs Paula Ellen, National Secretary, Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association Inc. ....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>JOHNSON, Mr Robert, Queensland Beekeepers Association .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>KEITH, Mr Donald Gordon , Private capacity .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>MCKEE, Dr Benjamin Alexander, Group Operations Manager, Capilano Honey Ltd .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PALLOT, Mr George Robert, President, Ipswich and West Moreton Beekeepers Association Inc. ....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>RUGE, Mr Rodney James, State President, Queensland Beekeepers Association.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>WEATHERHEAD, Mr Trevor Francis, Private capacity.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>WHITTEN, Dr Maxwell John, Private capacity .....</b>	<b>13</b>

**Committee met at 9.01 am**

**MCKEE, Dr Benjamin Alexander, Group Operations Manager, Capilano Honey Ltd**

**CHAIR (Mr Schultz)**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee has received a submission from Capilano Honey Ltd. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

[ LEGTHY EXCHANGE WITH DR MCKEE DELETED]

**CHAIR**—Dr McKee, thank you for your evidence. I am conscious of the fact that we have to keep moving, but can I say to you and to everybody in the room, as I said in my preliminary remarks, that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and consequently warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House. **That is telling you that the evidence that you give here comes under the full protection of the parliament. We can assure you that we will deal with anybody who intimidates anybody who gives frank and open evidence in this committee because they will have contravened the privileges of the House of Representatives of Australia.** Thank you very much for your evidence. I do appreciate it. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you.

[9.52 am]

**KEITH, Mr Donald Gordon , Private capacity**

**WHITTEN, Dr Maxwell John, Private capacity**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Keith**—Thank you. I have held numerous responsible positions in the beekeeping industry. I no longer hold those positions, but I have had 52 years experience as a commercial beekeeper. I would like to comment on the member for Corio's statement, but he has gone.

**CHAIR**—You might do that when he comes back, if you would not mind.

**Dr Whitten**—I have had 50 years as an amateur beekeeper, on and off, but my experience has been largely as a research manager, dealing with issues such as arguing the first case for the Eastern Creek quarantine facility with the Public Works Committee, then as chief of CSIRO Entomology, engaging research staff like Denis Anderson; also as chair of the first Honeybee Research and Development Council. So I have had a long experience of interaction with and support of the beekeeping industry.

**CHAIR**—Can I say at the outset that your contribution in previous inquiries is one of the reasons why this inquiry is running, and I thank you for it.

**Dr Whitten**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament. Consequently, it warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee has received submissions from Mr Keith and Dr Whitten. Are there any corrections or amendments that you would like to make to your submissions?

**Mr Keith**—No.

**Dr Whitten**—No.

**CHAIR**—I invite you to make a brief statement in relation to your submissions or some introductory remarks. I will ask Mr Keith to start and then perhaps he can comment about Mr O'Connor's comments.

**Mr Keith**—Yes, Mr Chairman.

**Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR**—Going to get into it, are we? That's good!

**Mr Keith**—I rather ashamedly have to remind you, Mr O'Connor, that the Melbourne Storm is at the top of the top. Mr Chairman, I did intend stating that I live at Inglewood in the great Murray-Darling Basin, which is almost unrecognisable to what it was 20 years ago.

Mr Chairman, both Dr Whitten and I have made individual submissions to the inquiry, but we did appear before your previous inquiry together and at the invitation of your inquiry we are appearing together today. As a consequence of that, we have discussed with each other the issues that we will discuss. At the outset, I would like to put on record our appreciation for the rural skills inquiry that you headed, and to the members of that inquiry, in particular Mr Adams, who is here today, our appreciation for you coming to an understanding of the broad nature and the size of the issue that confronts the bee industry and the pollination issue in Australia.

**CHAIR**—You can thank all of my committee for that. They were very much finely attuned to the problems of the honey bee industry. It is only done and we can only be attuned to it because of the evidence that we received from people such as yourself.

**Mr Keith**—We would also like to acknowledge that that has led to this inquiry and the government has already committed some funds towards the linkages between pollination and the honey bee industry. Thank you.

**The Centre for International Economics inquiry into the honey bee industry identified the two most serious threats to the industry as the issue of exotic diseases entering Australia, particularly varroa destructor, and the issue of maintenance of and access to honey bee resources. Subsequent to that, Mr Chairman, your inquiry fleshed out the issue of the ability of the honey bee industry to service the pollination issues in Australia, and that was followed up by a linkages workshop that did have the support of RIRDC. In my submission I endeavoured not to cover issues that I felt others would cover far better than I could. Between Dr Whitten and myself, I would like to discuss resource issues and Dr Whitten would like to speak on biosecurity issues, the pollination linkage issues and research and training.**

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mr Keith. Both you and Dr Whitten can discuss any matter that you like in relation to the honey bee industry, and I am quite sure that my learned colleague Mr Adams will have some well thought-out questions to put to you and I will let him lead.

**Mr ADAMS**—Thank you, Chair. I am interested in your views on the changing nature of water or the availability of water, the changing nature of agriculture and the effect that that will have on pollination services. Honey bees rely on flowers and their accessibility. Your thoughts on that would be greatly appreciated.

**Mr Keith**—Thank you, Mr Adams. On the issue of access to resources, honey bees are the only livestock that you cannot put into a paddock or a shed and purchase food for them and produce a product. Honey bees' energy food is honey and that can be

replaced with sugar, but you cannot turn sugar into honey. Honey can only be produced by bees having access to flowers. The issues in Australia as far as access to flowers is concerned are, first of all, land management issues. The second issue that I would like to discuss is climate change.

With regard to the production of honey, if our industry does not have access to sufficient flora, we will have to import honey. There is already a precedent for that. At the turn of the last century and at the beginning of this millennium, we went through an extended period of dry. Honey production gradually declined until the year 2003 when, by our standards, enormous levels of honey had to be imported into Australia.

**[DELETED LENGTHY DISCUSSION ON PROBLEMS RELATING TO ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS BY COMMERCIAL BEEKEEPERS.]**

**Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR**—Your assessment of the impact of the varroa mite, Dr Whitten, exceeds other estimates. I would like you to expand on that for the public record. You have alluded to that in your evidence, and it was one question that we did not put to Capilano as a major supplier in this industry—the impact of this mite. You talk about ‘feral bee population collapse, if and when varroa takes a foothold in Australia’. Firstly, what is the extent of the impact as you see it, and, secondly, are we prepared? Are the contingencies in place both within government and the industry?

**Dr Whitten**—The best evidence that I think we can draw upon from people like Denis Anderson is that it is a matter of when and not if varroa will come into Australia. The evidence from New Zealand, the US and elsewhere is that it will effectively wipe out the feral bees and probably the amateur beekeepers. In the US, the number of hives has dropped from five million to two million, for a variety of reasons.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Incredible.

**Dr Whitten**—So we have got some pretty good evidence from overseas as to the direct impact on the industry. It is a question then of the economics of this, which is quite interesting. The Centre for International Economics put a value on it of just under \$2 billion. In terms of those industries, if you withdrew the pollination services, some would collapse—almond is 100 per cent dependent, and so on. The aggregate value of that they put at about \$1.7 billion or \$1.8 billion. What they did not take into account was the impact in pastures.

If you look at New Zealand, forgetting about the total size of the losses, the impact in pastures is about 80 per cent of the losses. That is the economic analysis for New Zealand. Twenty per cent of the losses due to varroa will be in horticulture and 80 per cent in pastures, particularly the coarser clovers. Obviously, that mix is different between Australia and New Zealand, but if you were to say that it is going to be fifty-fifty—and we are talking now about the loss of mainly incidental pollination in improved pastures with the annual clovers and the nitrogen fixation—and I do not

think it is unreasonable to say that, if it is fifty-fifty and the horticultural losses are nearly \$2 billion, we are talking about a much higher figure. That is the economics.

But, to turn it another way around for this inquiry, I think what CSIRO did was quite interesting. They said, 'Forget about whether it's \$1 billion, \$2 billion or \$4 billion.' They were saying, 'What sort of effort should this country put into research, development and training? What sort of cost would it warrant, based on those figures?' They came up with a figure of \$50 million. They said economically it would justify that. They are not saying that we should spend it, but they are saying you could argue that economically.

To make the comparisons with the US, because the US is a bit ahead of us in the problems, I will quote from a bill before the US parliament—this was the second reading of that bill—where they talk about the value of pollination by honey and native bees of about \$18 billion. This bill is actually talking about something like \$20 million per year for a whole package of research training, and I am quite happy if you have that tabled so that you can see the situation in the US. I think the economics stack up in terms of whether it is \$2 billion to \$4 billion.

If we are talking about the sort of public investment and support by the industry, I think one could well argue for a program of something like up to \$10 million a year, driven by, say, core funding of \$4 million and supported by industry with leverage for the balance of that. An example which would give you some comparison is what has actually happened to the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management in Australia, and I am the government visitor for that centre so I know that quite well. You probably know that that CRC's bid to the government for support failed because the criteria related principally to the new criteria about economic returns, intellectual property and so on. The criteria disqualified effectively the Weeds CRC from bidding. They have now put to the government a new bid for an Australian Centre for Weed Research. I think that is an interesting model to look at, because the value of weeds in economic and environmental terms is about \$4 billion, so we are talking about something of the same value.

What is now being asked of the government—and I think there is bipartisan interest in this—is something like \$4 million a year over 10 years, and then supported by funds from groups such as the Grains Research and Development Corporation for nearly \$1 million a year, bringing it up to about \$10 million. The government's model has not been talked about, but it will not be like a CRC model, which I think is now top-heavy. A lot of the resources are devoted to governance, and it is too rigid a structure. The weeds model is now moving away from that towards a much looser structure between those groups that benefit—the research providers and so on. So you have got a model on your doorstep to look at.

If I can perhaps just talk about where we are today: the Linkage workshop in Canberra came up with a number of interesting recommendations. They were picked up by the minister, Minister McGauran, who provided \$300,000 to move that forward, and he said in his media release that he is talking about an alliance:

The alliance will develop a strategic plan, including a risk management strategy, a pollination business model, an education and training strategy and a communications plan.

And you probably heard a bit more on Wednesday evening from RIRDC—people like Margie Thomson. That \$300,000 is going to be used, via a steering committee, to develop a business plan which will assume a new industry body, something which will draw in the providers of pollination services and those that would either benefit from or depend upon pollination services—so a new industry body, which I do not think there is a precedent for in Australia, but it will obviously bring in the beekeeping industry and those commodities that will benefit from it. Once you have that industry body, the business plan for that body is likely to have three components. The first component will deal with the R&D plan, a five-year or whatever R&D plan. The second component of that business plan would deal with a biosecurity issue. The third component would be the skills training and communications.

I go back to the research component. **You know that the Commonwealth sold the quarantine facility. Its future beyond 2010 is not obvious. There is little evidence that there is tangible work being done at this stage to replace that facility, although Minister McGauran said at the Victorian association meeting a couple of weeks back that they guarantee there will be a replacement. But the reality is that there is not much being done, so there is now an opportunity to take that adverse situation and say, ‘We need a new quarantine facility. Let’s expand that facility to have a research capability which would deal with issues like importing material for genetic improvement for disease resistance and so on.’**

With this model that we are talking about under this new industry group—say we call it ‘Pollination Australia’—the research structure that you would put in place would be one based on a cooperative arrangement funded or managed through the Rural Industries R&D Corporation. You would then drag in researchers and teachers from across this country into a pollination industry network, having a visible centre which would replace the existing quarantine facility, but add to it a biotechnology research capability which would then allow researchers to come to do specific research. It would also be used for training. It would reach out across the research and the training industries of Australia. I think that is where this inquiry can go.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—Thank you for all that framework that you have given the committee on how you see this might proceed. My question is: are we moving quickly enough in this area? There seems to be a degree of urgency about getting these frameworks and structures in place, given the dimensions of the threat.

**Dr Whitten**—Firstly, I hope the committee reaches its conclusions and puts out a report as soon as possible, because there is an urgency. Varroa is on the doorstep and I do not believe we are going to stop it, and, indeed, that is an issue that I would like to see raised. I have put it in my recommendations. Probably I can be a bit more frank than others, because they have to think of the ramifications once they go outside this room, but you know the old Arab saying, ‘He who speaks the truth has one foot in the stirrup’? I can, on the basis of that, say that our current preparedness is grossly inadequate in Australia.

So that you really understand what happens with the Asian honey bee situation: when a colony was detected like it was in Cairns, the electrician and the owner rang up the department, to be told, 'Go find a beekeeper,' or, 'Here's the name of a beekeeper to remove that,' because it was a nuisance hive. Luckily, that beekeeper was able to identify that it was the Asian honey bee. It was then a long weekend. You can talk to people here who were directly involved in that process. There was no preparedness. Nobody knew how to control that swarm. Nobody knew what to do with the material: where it was to go; how it was to be analysed. There were turf wars within the department here over advice from one part of the department to the other. AQIS at the time did not want to know about it because they regarded it as a post-entry issue and not their concern.

Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR—Dr Whitten, what you are saying is that we have a \$60 million industry, an industry downstream to the value of some \$4 billion, an imminent threat to the livelihood of producers in that industry directly, and we are hopelessly—that is what I am hearing from what you are saying—unprepared for this contingency.

Dr Whitten—Yes. I will make two comments on that. The Asian honey bee I think was a minor risk compared to the European honey bee, and there are examples of detections of swarms in the Port of Brisbane where it was assumed that they came from local hives. If the mite is going to come into Australia it is likely to come in on the European honey bee. The empirical evidence is that we are not well prepared. Worse still, you will not get, I believe, honest and open advice from any of those organisations. You may remember recently the experience of Allan Kessing. There is no adequate whistleblower legislation at the Commonwealth level. I can give you more specific examples of the unlikelihood that you will get adequate information to tell you how bad that situation is.

CHAIR—What is the immediate answer? What we are talking about now is trying to fix something that we should have been working on five or 10 years ago.

Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR—While you were out, Mr Chairman, Dr Whitten did go through a whole range of measures and frameworks and things that might address the problem.

CHAIR—Okay. My apologies. Can I ask another question that is centred on the very issue that you are talking about now. What would be the ramifications if the Eastern Creek quarantine facility is not replaced?

Dr Whitten—I think that would be disastrous. In fact, while you were absent we were talking about making virtue out of adversity. I had the interesting experience of arguing the case back in the seventies for why that facility should be built, and now we find that the Commonwealth sold it on the basis that they could privatise those services. They may well do that for cats and dogs and so on, but not for honey bees.

As you know, the developers now want to do other things with that facility, and so does AQIS, so let us accept that that is a reality. I mentioned that there is no

evidence that AQIS is effectively pursuing the alternative. I say that because the likely party to be involved in that is the New South Wales department, and I know that there are no negotiations taking place between AQIS and the New South Wales department which currently manages that facility, so there is strong evidence that nothing is happening. But let us make a virtue out of that by saying, 'Let's build a new quarantine facility that is a state-of-the-art facility and that has a research capability.' That then becomes an element of what you have been talking about: a new alliance, a new network in Australia which is focused on that facility but reaches out to all the different research and teaching organisations in Australia. We have examples of the economics in the US, New Zealand and also in Australia with the national wheat centre.

There is a matter of urgency, I believe. The steering committee that is about to be set up, using the funds provided by Minister McGauran, will, I believe, make recommendations at the end of this year or early next year about a business plan, a new industry centred around the providers of the pollination services and those who will either depend on or benefit from those. There is no precedent for that industry at this stage, but your committee will be central to making a recommendation that will provide the sort of financial support that will make the whole show possible. It will be largely driven by in-kind contributions or cash contributions from those industry groups, particularly the horticultural and the pastoral industries, which really make this an issue of central importance.

**CHAIR—**You mentioned Minister McGauran. It would be fair to say, would it not, that we should be also putting a bit of pressure on Minister Bishop, because of her portfolio, in terms of the educational process that research and development requires?

**Dr Whitten—**Yes.

**CHAIR—**I will just make an observation. It would appear to me that, up until we did the rural skills inquiry and up until we started this inquiry, there was not so much an ignorance but a mindset out there, among all of the state and territory government organisations, the community as a whole, and even the people who are involved in agriculture and horticulture, that the honey bee industry was a small industry contributing a small amount to the economy of the country. Nobody had given any thought to the direct and indirect contribution that it makes to the economy of this country through our food chain.

Do you believe that that attitude would prevail for decades, to the extent where we have this sort of attitude from AQIS and others, about the unimportance of the honey bee industry and the lack of understanding totally the full ramifications of that ignorance?

**Dr Whitten—**I think a lot of us can share the blame. I, as a research manager, as chief of a CSIRO division, did not do enough when I was in the job. I engaged—it turned out to be a good decision—Denis Anderson, who is the world expert on Asian honey bee, on varroa and on bee diseases; but his project was

funded by ACIAR. We gave marginal funding, and there was a bit of money from the Honeybee R&D Advisory Committee.

There had been studies done within the industry about the value of the industry. They were regarded with suspicion from outside, but we knew that the broader industry was of much greater value. We had evidence from the US. Where I think the whole thing turned around was, firstly, the independent study commissioned by the government, by the Centre for International Economics. That put some real teeth into those issues. What is really focusing attention now is the realisation that we have had a free ride based on the feral honey bees, and varroa has created that shock. If varroa never comes to Australia, we have the benefit of now realising the importance of that industry, but we have a long way to go.

When we tried to get the players together for that Linkages workshop, it was a unique experience in Australia. In the same room we had the beekeeping industry, the relevant funding bodies, the research providers and the other industries. It was a real ask to get those industries together. Of the funding bodies, HAL has a long way to go. They sent along a person who had been in the job for a couple of weeks and did not know what the issues were. We had enormous difficulty persuading governments, like the Northern Territory—they sent one person who was not from the government but one of the producer groups—and Queensland. It is not even on the register in Victoria. We spoke to senior managers like Ross Field, and it was not even on their radar screen in Victoria. We had great difficulty finding who the players were in Tasmania, and we got nobody from WA. This was for a Linkages workshop to deal with these problems. We can identify almost all the states. New South Wales and South Australia were the only states who were even close to recognising what the issues were.

From the industry groups, it was interesting to see those industry bodies that actually use investment funds, such as Timbercorp Ltd and Macquarie Horticultural Services. They immediately saw what the risks were for those industries, so there was an immediate response at that Linkages workshop of wanting to put their money on the table. But we had difficulty persuading some of the people from the state governments to even write to Minister McGauran to find the money that he has put into it. So we have a long way to go with state governments. You have only got to see that in Queensland that they do not even list the resource issue as one of the topics.

Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR—So how do you take that next step? You have obviously taken one step and it was largely productive but at the same time inadequate. Is there something that can be done again immediately? We have talked about the urgency of these matters. It would seem that some of the key commercial players certainly lifted the ante once the facts were on the table and people were around the table listening to the discussions and argument. Just ponder that, Dr Whitten. You do not have to give me an answer today, but it would seem that a practical suggestion is needed from people like yourselves and the industry on how you advance the Linkages theme and lift it higher, because it

would seem to me that some of the big industries have to be encouraged to take a more active interest, as well as the commercial players.

Dr Whitten—I do not know if you actually looked at the *About the House* video that was put out recently. I think the Chair was involved in it. I mentioned that this was the first time, in my long experience, when politicians were leading the charge. Normally we are banging on the doors—

CHAIR—We react.

Dr Whitten—and you are reacting or not reacting. This was a case where the politicians could see what the problems were.

Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR—Dr Whitten, it is a smart committee.

CHAIR—That comment was made in a light-hearted way, but I have to say to you that this is the most bipartisan committee that I have experienced in all my time in politics. We work together because we have a common goal, and that is to fix the problem.

Dr Whitten—I hope you are not just smart but also quick, because we need key recommendations from this committee. The steering committee that will be managed through RIRDC will come up with some clear recommendations about an industry arrangement and a business plan which will cover, as I say, research, biosecurity and then education, training and communication.

Mr ADAMS—Could we also hope that some of these will drive some of those state governments as well. The horticulture industry, the fruit growers associations, and the cherry industry—a growing industry in my state—all have to get on board.

CHAIR—Fertiliser companies—everybody should be involved in it. Their whole business depends on the success of what we are trying to achieve here. We need to get some seed funding in to stimulate some of this movement, don't we? What sort of seed money do you think we need in order to put pressure on quickly, and where should we direct that? We need to know that. Those are the first two questions.

The second point I want to make to you is that we would like to get this report and the recommendations out before the next election. We will find that to be a pretty tall order but, when we come back in the next parliament sometime in the new year, we will have—through the same committee, hopefully, or a reconstituted committee, the evidence there to put that forward quickly. But I think we need to do something quickly to put some seed money in. Your industry is not capable of generating the funds through the levy process et cetera that we need immediately to get this thing up and moving. Would you agree with that?

Dr Whitten—But even if you were to say, 'Look, here's \$4 million a year now,' it could not be used.

**Mr ADAMS—You have to have lead time.**

**Dr Whitten—Yes. You need the new industry body in place, I believe. That industry body has to see what the common benefits are. The beekeeping industry, I believe, is largely onside, but it needs to see the future in terms of pollination. The Linkage workshop was quite interesting because, while I said that there were difficulties getting people there, there were some roads to Damascus by some of the industries present—the pastures industry, the cherry industry and I think the avocado industry were there. But certainly the guys from the almond industry were very keen.**

**The first thing we need to do is to try to get that body together and then put some teeth into the lines, and I think a trigger for that will have to be something very quick in terms of the future for the quarantine facility. There is nothing being done that I can see at the moment to provide a quarantine facility. If that is simply broadened, because there will be a lead time for the funding and the building of that, in that time while you are putting together a new facility with a research capability, the business plan for this new Pollination Australia would be put in place, and you would then have an R&D program as well as a biosecurity program, as well as an education, training and communications program.**

**CHAIR—I do not want to put the politics into it. The practical reality is that we are leading up to an election, but it might be beneficial for you two guys to give me some ideas on that so that I can get into the process now, outside of the time frame that is involved in putting our report together and making the recommendations. I think it is that urgent. That is one of the reasons why I have asked those questions. If you two guys could do something with me, as the chair, to take to the minister as a matter of urgency through my committee, that would be beneficial to your industry, and perhaps take some concern and stress away from people.**

**Dr Whitten—Would you object, though, if that were actually done through the steering committee? I think the steering committee can operate more quickly.**

**CHAIR—Yes.**

**Dr Whitten—You will then have DAFF people on board, you will have industry people and so on. I will talk to Margie Thomson, because they have been a bit slow putting together—**

**CHAIR—We are anxious to help you in your concern about getting into this process quickly.**

**Mr ADAMS—Dr Whitten is going to table something.**

**Dr Whitten—There are at least three things that are in the Queensland submission to draw to your attention. I think there must be a friend there, because they have led with their chin here by not indicating the resource issue**

**and then educating people who do not count. They are the people who need to be educated.**

**Mr ADAMS—Get some science in maybe, some real science.**

**Dr Whitten—Some economic logic, as well, and some rationality. The second one is to see that the US is now addressing those same issues and we are a bit behind.**

**Mr ADAMS—That is the congress, is it?**

**Dr Whitten—It is the Senate actually. Don might be able to talk to that one. It is a Senate bill proposing research funding—**

**CHAIR—Why don't we table that, because we have to keep moving along?**

**Mr ADAMS—There was one other thing.**

**Dr Whitten—The third thing to table is the submission that went to both Mr McGauran and Senator Abetz, and I think to Labor, in relation to the Australian Centre for Weed Research.**

**Mr ADAMS—That is right.**

**Dr Whitten—It is a very interesting model: similar economic type problems, a mixture of public good and so on. I am not sure exactly where that one is, but at least it is relevant. So you have three relevant documents there.**

**CHAIR—Any documents that you want to table today, we can formalise now. Is it the wish of the committee that the documents tabled by Dr Max Whitten and Mr Don Keith be accepted as exhibits and received as evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered. I have just received a very sensible suggestion from Gavan O'Connor that we write to the steering committee and get them to come in and give evidence again.**

**Proceedings suspended from 10.46 am to 11.07 am**

**CHAIR—We will reconvene this hearing. We are listening to a further contribution by Mr Keith before we call further witnesses. Mr Keith, the floor is yours.**

**[FURTHER DISCUSSION ON RELEVANCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE DELETED]**

**CHAIR—Okay. Your contribution is very much appreciated, particularly your latter contribution. I thank you, Dr Whitten and Mr Keith, for your attendance here**

today. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you.

[11.17 am]

**DEWAR, Mrs Paula Ellen, National Secretary, Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association Inc.**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mrs Dewar**—Yes. I am also a director on the board of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, representing the queen breeding sector.

**CHAIR**—Given your comments about the Australian bee breeding industry—how good it is and that the stock that you are producing is good in terms of the genetics of the bees themselves—do you have any views on the pressure that is being put on Australia from some countries for us to import bees into this country, and, if so, what are the concerns of your industry in that regard?

**Mrs Dewar**—I know that the US and some European countries have made inquiries of some of my members about bringing in their stock because they believe they have the best stock around. The stock that Australia has demonstrates that it works extremely well in our climate. Although we do get repeat custom from overseas, there are still people who prefer their own stock, and, with that in mind, we do need to have a quarantine facility available so that queen breeders can import stock, perhaps to enrich what we have, but also to supply the needs of the customers overseas.

**[EXCHANGE RELATING TO QUEEN BEE BREEDING DELETED]**

**CHAIR**—You are complementing the evidence that we have just heard from Dr Whitten and Mr Keith about the need to have significant quarantine facilities so that if we get into a position of importing bees, let alone anything else, we have the capacity to ensure that that quarantine inspection process, through that facility, safeguards our industry from any possible disease or problems that may come in if we did not have those facilities available when bees were imported.

**Mrs Dewar**—definitely.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

**[MATERIAL DELETED]**

**Mrs Dewar**—When small hive beetle came in, I was president of the Queensland Beekeepers Association. For various reasons it was declared endemic. Because the beetle is migratory, beekeepers cannot stop the spread. The only thing that can be done is research into how to control it. We know that putting it in freezer rooms, which we have done ourselves, will kill off small hive beetle, but that will just kill off

the small hive beetles that happen to be in the honey or the stickies that we bring back to the shed for extracting.

I did have an occasion to complain about the chairman of the Honeybee Research and Development Council at the time. He said, 'With all the millions in the USA, they've not come up with a solution to small hive beetle. What can we do with our small budget?' I found, a few weeks back when I was in the US, that there is very little being done about small hive beetle because they have varroa and they have a war in Iraq, so they are spending a lot of money elsewhere. There is not a lot of money being spent on research.

**Because of the climate in Australia, especially in south-east Queensland where it is very humid, small hive beetle is a great threat to the queen-breeding sector mainly, in that we have small hives, so we have fewer bees that are able to restrict the small hive beetle. It came in; it was a quarantine breach. Basically, government did not put any money forward to assist us to live with that breach of quarantine.** We have even asked the Australian Taxation Office for tax concessions with regard to the capital purchase of coldrooms and that sort of thing to assist us.

**CHAIR**—What did they say?

**Mrs Dewar**—They said, 'You can go and hire a coldroom and that is fully tax deductible.' Do we hire a coldroom for the next 40 years or do we go out and buy one? It is very simplistic.

**CHAIR**—I have to say, that does not surprise me. Thank you very much for your evidence. It has been most helpful, as is all of the evidence that we are receiving. Once again, we enjoy the frankness of the evidence that we get. I remind witnesses once again that you are under the protection of the House as far as giving evidence is concerned in these processes, and I encourage you to be as open and frank as you want to be. Thank you for your attendance here today. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will write to you. Before I call the next witness, I might let everybody in the room know that, through the very professional media and communications liaison projects team in the department, the House of Representatives has put out a CD about the work of our committees. We now have another story about the honey bee industry in it and it is headed, 'It's crunch time for Australia's honey bees.' The process of education is ongoing through our committee process. I am not sure what the ramifications are of putting this outside of the parliament but if we can, we would certainly like to get one to you.

[11.56 am]

**BARNES, Mr Peter Roy, Wide Bay Branch Representative, Queensland Beekeepers Association**

**BRADFORD, Mr Neville Terence, Executive Member, Brisbane Branch Representative, Queensland Beekeepers Association**

**CARRUTHERS, Mr Rex, Vice-President, Queensland Beekeepers Association**

**JOHNSON, Mr Robert, Queensland Beekeepers Association**

**RUGE, Mr Rodney James, State President, Queensland Beekeepers Association**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of the Queensland Beekeepers Association. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today?

**Mr P Barnes**—Yes. I am also a commercial honey producer.

**Mr Carruthers**—I am the outgoing President of the Queensland Beekeepers Association, the current resource committee chairman, and also the national resource committee chairman.

**Mr Ruge**—As well as being the current State President of the Queensland Beekeepers Association I am the quarantine committee chairman for Queensland and a commercial beekeeper.

**Mr Johnson**—I am the State Secretary of the Queensland Beekeepers Association and I have been involved in the beekeeping industry for about 40 years.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, gentlemen. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and consequently warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The committee has received a submission from the Queensland Beekeepers Association and also personal submissions from Mr Ruge, Mr Bradford and Mr Barnes. Are there any corrections or amendments that you would like to make to your submissions?

**Mr Ruge**—Yes, I have a couple on my submission. I have a couple of typing errors under the biosecurity issues. I have, ‘We can never be too vigilante.’ That should be ‘vigilant’; we just need to take the ‘e’ off.

**CHAIR**—That could be appropriate in this inquiry!

**Mr Ruge**—Sorry about that. Also I have spelt ‘small hive beetle’ wrongly in two instances. It should be double ‘e’ and not ‘ea’. Apart from that, I have no other comments.

**CHAIR**—Nice to know we have some humans giving evidence! Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or some introductory remarks?

**Mr Ruge**—On my personal submission?

**CHAIR**—On any of the submissions that you have put forward.

**Mr Ruge**—I would like to make a few remarks on my own submission. However, Rex Carruthers is going to talk to the QBA submission, as he is the author of that.

**CHAIR**—I will leave you to work out who is going to make comment first, and then we will take questions.

**Mr Ruge**—I think we will deal with the QBA submission first.

**Mr Carruthers**—**I do not have much to add to my submission, but I do have a few points that I would like to highlight. Biosecurity is rated as one of the highest threats to the industry. In May this year, apis cerana was discovered in Cairns. It is not my intention to criticise the Queensland government with regard to the way that this matter was handled, but rather that both government and industry should learn from the experience we had. I was directly involved with that incursion and a fair few things were done wrong.**

**The facts were that the Asian honey bees had arrived in Cairns undetected. They had set up in the port region for six months before they were discovered. If this hive of bees had been carrying varroa mites, the task ahead confronting government and industry would have been very expensive, not only in dollar terms but also in man-hours. Border security issues must be taken more seriously by all concerned. History shows that varroa, once in a country, is impossible to eradicate. So from an industry point of view—and, no doubt, from the broader community point of view—it makes sense to try to stop this pest crossing our borders rather than trying to deal with it when it gets here.**

The other issue, of course, is loss of native resource. In Queensland, it has become a huge problem. Considering that the large proportion of honey-producing forests are on public land, land use changes are of critical importance. The government of the day has the ability to restrict access to these lands and, in turn, to limit the size and the effectiveness of the honey bee industry to produce honey and pollination services. The lack of sound scientific evidence leaves the door open for policy makers to make decisions based on ideological beliefs rather than hard data and factual information.

To go over one of the issues that Max Whitten raised this morning, on perusal of submission No. 25 from the Queensland government, I noticed the absence of the access of floral resource from the list of key issues impacting on the issue and yet, as I read on, I saw that 800,000 hectares of traditional honey bee resource will be lost to

the industry in 2024. Investigations by the government to date have found almost 19,000 hectares of honey-yielding forest on freehold land that may be used. We do not know whether or not we will get that. Considering the substantial shortfall in land mass between 19,000 and 800,000 hectares, one would assume that the Queensland government does not require a viable honey bee industry for honey production or for pollination services that it provides.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Carruthers.

**Mr ADAMS**—The honey bee industry is facing devastation in Queensland: you have a state government that is denying you access; and you have the threat of pests and yet the authorities do not seem to be ready to deal with the pests that have already shown up in the last couple of years. Will the industry be devastated? Will it be here after 2024?

**Mr Carruthers**—Unless things change in that time, no. The industry as it stands will not survive after 2024 if the legislation remains the same. There is not enough resource to sustain this industry.

[MATERIAL DELETED]

**Mr ADAMS**—Does anybody else wish to add something? What about the issue of not being ready when we discover these nuisance swarms? I have been told some stories about swarms showing up. Maybe you would like to tell us the story of what happened in Cairns. Were we sufficiently ready to deal with that issue? Was it dealt with in a manner that is sufficient for this industry to continue in its present form?

**Mr Carruthers**—I will run through the chain of events associated with this incursion. I got a phone call on the Friday morning from the beekeeper called to move a swarm of bees from the boat mast. It was the Friday prior to the long weekend in May. The beekeeper had some experience with Asian honey bees, so we were very fortunate in that sense. Of course, a beekeeper's identification of a pest is not sufficient to make a ruling on that pest. I was notified at 10 o'clock on the Friday morning that there was a possible incursion of *apis cerana* in Cairns. I actually found out that it had been positively identified from Trevor Monson in Victoria, who read the newspaper the next morning. At the time I was state president, but I was not notified that those bees were positively identified until the Monday morning of the long weekend. Being a long weekend, there was nothing done on the Monday. The wheels were set in motion on the Tuesday. The hive of bees in the boat mast was fairly small but, nevertheless, still alive. There are a set of circumstances that create a problem in the sense that AQIS look after the actual port facility but, once a swarm has gone out of that area, it is the responsibility of DPIF.

**CHAIR**—Are you saying there is a demarcation problem?

**Mr Carruthers**—There is.

**CHAIR**—Goodness me!

**Mr Carruthers**—If it is on the wrong side of the fence, it is no longer AQIS's responsibility.

**CHAIR**—It is the responsibility of the other department?

**Mr Carruthers**—Yes. So we do have that problem where the responsibility is moved from one department to another. Once the hive is out in the general public—once it has moved from the port—it is, as in this case, called a nuisance swarm. That is what happened with these bees. Even though it was in a high-risk area—what we would all assume would be a high-risk area because it was within 250 metres of the port—it was still classified as a nuisance beehive. An electrician trying to rewire the mast rang the department and he was put onto the beekeeper—he was either put onto the beekeeper or he was given his name and phone number—to sort the mess out so that he could rewire the boat mast.

**Mr ADAMS**—We are on the verge of having a major pest entering Australia which could wipe out this industry, or a major part of it—change the whole structure of pollination and destroy some industries—but we do not have a task force which would contact the Queensland Beekeepers Association and say, 'We've discovered some Asian bees in Cairns. We want to let you know so you can notify your membership.' There is no structure like that set up? The departments do not have a structure whereby they are talking to each other?

**Mr Carruthers**—They do, but to get that implemented, it all seems to be back to front. It was actually the beekeeping industry that rang the alarm bells in this case. In most cases that is the way it happens.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that we have government departments on our borders, who have a responsibility for protecting our borders, creating problems because of demarcation lines, where a bee flies from one side of the line to the other? We have a situation where we have a nine to five mentality and we do not work on public holidays, so the person who identifies the hive—in this case, an electrician—is then, through the department, put in touch with a beekeeper, who is then asked to come and do the work that is the responsibility of the quarantine people and the border protection people. Did the beekeeper get paid by the government for doing the work?

**Mr Carruthers**—No.

**CHAIR**—That is just outrageous. It is a clear indication of why we have to do something very quickly to tighten up all of our procedures across this country. I think that is just outrageous. You can rest assured I will be taking it up with the minister outside of the committee.

**Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR**—Does the industry liaise with port owners in Queensland? What initiatives have been taken by your association to get a protocol in place?

**Mr Carruthers**—Our industry approached AQIS with regard to getting to know the people on the waterfront. We had a swarm detected at Fisherman's Island. We

wanted to show our appreciation to the waterfront workers for their vigilance by giving them some honey. That was almost impossible to do because of security issues. That, of course, has been compounded since 9/11.

**CHAIR**—At least that side of our security is working.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—I think there are some fairly simple measures that could be undertaken there, with people of goodwill, to up the surveillance potential in the ports. That ought to be something that we can look at in the context of the recommendations.

**Mr Carruthers**—In defence of the Queensland government, we possibly do run the most comprehensive surveillance network of hives in all of the country. Even though this issue in Cairns shows how big a shortfall we had in being adequate, in the scheme of things we still have the best surveillance network in the country.

**CHAIR**—That is the second line or the third line of defence. Nothing happened in relation to that particular instance at the first and second lines. That is really worrying, from my point of view.

**Mr Carruthers**—Part of that surveillance is on the ports.

**Mr ADAMS**—Are there hives set up there? Do you have hives whose role is to identify issues within them?

**Mr Carruthers**—Yes.

**Mr ADAMS**—Can you tell us how that operates?

**Mr Carruthers**—We have hives positioned at most of the ports in Queensland. They are monitored by QDPI, the Queensland department of primary industries. Every quarter they are tested for all the mites. It is done by what we call a sticky mat procedure, where the hive is a standard beehive with a drawer in the bottom of it which contains a sticky mat. Mitred side strips are placed in that hive for 24 hours, with the sticky mat underneath the brood. The sticky mat is removed and sent to the lab for analysis to see if there are any mites found. Live bees are also taken to check for tracheal mite, and I think they are likewise checked every quarter.

To complement that, which is the first line of surveillance, the industry also runs a similar hive—that is, with hobbyists in a stationary position—with part-timers and of course with commercial people as well, which travels wherever our commercial bees go. In Queensland we have 80 of those hives—40 owned by the government and 40 owned by the industry.

**Mr ADAMS**—After these have been looked at on a regular basis—three months or six months, or whatever—is there a report written or does a departmental person then give the feedback? Who gets the feedback?

**Mr Carruthers**—The departmental people keep all the records, and those records are available to us.

**Mr ADAMS**—How many of those hives do you think are necessary to give adequate coverage in Queensland?

**Mr Carruthers**—I think the figure quoted out of New Zealand is that one in three needs to be tested. Peter might be able to better answer that. He has just done a tour to New Zealand to see what their surveillance is.

**Mr P Barnes**—In some areas they were testing one in five hives and it still got through their system.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—How do we compare with that statistic?

**Mr P Barnes**—Very poorly. I think the figure for Queensland was that 600 surveillance hives should be in place.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—And we have 80?

**Mr P Barnes**—We have 80. But we also have dangerous parallels with when it first occurred in Auckland, as far as our department of primary industry office is run. They were at the same level that we are, where the Queensland government is scaling back the department’s surveillance officers and increasing the workload. That is what happened in New Zealand about the same time. I would also like to point out that, with the incursion in Cairns, we were lucky. It was the fact that they were a different species of bee that allowed them to be detected. If that had been our honey bees, it may have been a different case. The guy might have just put them in a box and taken them home. That is probably the more dangerous point: the fact that varroa comes in on a swarm of our bees and then some hobbyist takes them home without realising it. That is one of the rumours about what happened to cause the outbreak on the southern island of New Zealand.

**Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR**—I think we get the drift that the biosecurity procedures, resources and whatever are totally inadequate to cope with a possible incursion. Can I just shift the ground here and get onto some trade issues. How do you ever hope to compete with Argentina and China? Let us rev it up: why shouldn’t the Australian housewife and consumer have access to cheap imported honey?

[ MATERIAL DELETED ]

**CHAIR**—Gentlemen, we will break for lunch.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.29 pm to 1.32 pm**

**CHAIR**—Ladies and gentlemen, we will reconvene this public inquiry into the honey bee industry, and I now call on the Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc. to continue their evidence.

**Mr Carruthers**—For the committee’s record, I would like to quickly go through the dates and what occurred in the Cairns incursion so that we all have a clear perspective on how, when and why it happened. I was notified on 4 May by a QBA member in Cairns that a suspect colony was found. On 7 May, Allison Crook, who was the then acting chief of Biosecurity Queensland, notified me by telephone that the suspect colony was there. With all due respect to Allison, Monday was a public holiday, and she had just taken over on Friday night from Ron Glanville, who was the chief of Biosecurity, so she was filling in a temporary position. On 9 May, QBA assembled 20 sticky-mat bottom boards to send to Cairns—we had them already built—and we sent them up there to enhance the surveillance effort. On 10 May, pheromone traps were put in place around the port area. On 12 May there was a public meeting in Cairns, and all the beekeepers were invited so that they could be made aware of the findings, and also so that maybe we could get some cooperation from the local beekeepers.

On 17 May the second suspect colony was found. There was limited surveillance between 4 May and somewhere between the 12th and the 17th—I am not exactly sure of the date—before full-scale AusVet plan surveillance was put in place. I flew to Cairns on 20 May, and over the next few days we proceeded to clean up the suspect colonies as they were positively identified. We sent half the samples of bees from the colonies to Denis Anderson at CSIRO in Canberra and the other half to DPI at Indooroopilly.

The problem I saw was that in the elapsed time between 4 May and 9 May there was not much activity—and the activity was still very limited on 9 May—and it did not get into full swing until somewhere around 17 May. That is just a brief record of how the incursion unfolded. I will say that, as acting chief of Biosecurity, Allison Crook rang me twice every day. Whether it was Saturday or Sunday did not matter, so much so that my wife got very concerned about the strange woman on the end of the phone! She did keep us up to date on everything that was happening and did involve us fairly heavily in the decision making once everything started to happen. There was a fairly big time lapse between when the colony was first found and when any serious action was taken.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Carruthers. As I said earlier, it is very disturbing to hear a story about that sort of event occurring in an environment where we should all be attuned to protecting our country from the incursions of insects and/or mites which have the potential to create massive problems for our agricultural and horticultural industries.

**CHAIR**—What do you see as the research priorities for the industry and how should this research be funded?

**Mr Ruge**—There has to be research done into varroa—or more research done. Dr Denis Anderson believes that he can alter the lifecycle to combat the spread of varroa naturally. With regard to funding, I am at a loss to comment on that.

**Mr P Barnes**—Some research has been done into varroa in New Zealand to do with queens that are resistant to varroa. When varroa attacks the brood, they are finding that some queens are resistant, to the point that the varroa cannot reproduce in the brood. They have got it now up to 75 per cent, but they do not have any more funding because, unlike in Australia, their research has to generate funds to continue these projects. Some of these areas could be explored for us in the future. But, unfortunately, with the wide range and use of chemicals, it is cheaper for the government in New Zealand to support the chemicals and get the tax benefits than to fund the research into finding natural ways of defending against varroa.

[2.08 pm]

[MATERIAL DELETED]

**CHAIR**—Before I close the committee meeting, I noticed that somebody wanted to make some comment from the back of the room. The formal process does not allow you to do that, but you can do that after I close the meeting. Thank you for your attendance today and thank you also to Hansard once again, the group of professionals who work with the secretariat to make sure these things happen, make sure they happen on time and make sure they happen in a very professional way.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr O'Connor**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 4.24 pm**