



Pollination Australia



22nd May 2008

Mr Roger Beale AO
Quarantine and Biosecurity Review
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601

*Almond Board of Australia
Apple and Pear Australia
Australian Honeybee Industry Council
Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association
Australian Melon Association
Australian Onion Industry Association
Australian Prune Industry Association
AUSVEG
Avocados Australia
Canned Fruits Industry Council of Australia
Cherry Growers of Australia
Horticulture Australia Council
Summerfruit Australia*

Dear Mr Beale,

Urgent call to avoid a sticky situation

Australia is facing a ludicrous quarantine situation. For the want of \$150,000 a year, industries valued at \$1.7 billion a year face a serious risk of collapse.

The industries most at risk are those that have a critical reliance on honeybee pollination, including almonds, apples and pears, avocados, melons, dried prunes and much of the summerfruit and vegetable industries. Recognition of this risk was a key trigger in the formation of Pollination Australia, a new industry alliance addressing the common interests of commercial beekeepers and those industries dependent on honeybee pollination.

Many other horticultural and pastoral industries rely on honeybee pollination to a lesser, but still significant extent.

The general community would also be detrimentally impacted by potentially higher food prices and home gardeners would not have their fruit and vegetables pollinated.

The risk is that a serious pest of honeybees not yet found in Australia, a mite called *Varroa destructor*, could easily enter this country undetected.

This mite is now present in most countries of the world and recently spread throughout New Zealand. Researchers talk about 'when' the *Varroa* mite will reach Australia, not 'if' it will reach our shores.

When *Varroa* reaches Australia, the feral honeybee populations that are also important for pollination would be wiped out and pollination of fruit and vegetable crops would become completely dependent on managed honeybee services.

However, current honeybee hives available are insufficient to provide such services, and the management of honeybees would be made more difficult and costly due to the presence of the mite.

Effective at-the-border surveillance measures would allow for early detection of such a *Varroa* incursion thereby enabling options to control spread of the mite, or even contain it and eliminate it.

If *Varroa* does become established, it is most likely that eradication and/or containment measures will have limited effect beyond slowing the spread of the pest due to the ecology of the parasite and the social behaviour of bees.

Since 2000 the Federal Government has operated the National Sentinel Hive Program at various airports and seaports across Australia, with responsibility transferring from AQIS to the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer. The cost of operation of this program is estimated at \$150,000 per annum.

However, DAFF has advised that it will not continue to fund this program as at 1 July 2008 unless a formal commitment is received by 30 June 2008 from the honeybee industry to fund this program from 1 July 2009.

A *Varroa destructor* incursion into Australia will have a devastating direct impact across a broad range of industries including the honeybee industry, many horticultural and agricultural industries, in addition to significant indirect impacts across the community at large. It is estimated that the total flow-on economic impact would be in the order of \$3.7 billion.

Government support is urgently requested for continued operation and funding support for this National Surveillance Hive Program that essentially acts as Australia's "first line of defence".

Given the complex and broad reaching consequences of a potential incursion affecting honeybees, such as *Varroa destructor*, there is strong argument for Government funding in order to ensure effective and efficient operation of this surveillance program, thereby protecting the viability of many Australian industries.

In order to operate within the 30 June 2008 deadline issued by DAFF, we urgently request a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss this critical issue.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Haslett
Interim Secretary

POLLINATION AUSTRALIA is the industry alliance of the honeybee industry and pollination dependent industries.

VISION: An economically sustainable pollination industry providing competitive pollination services for Australian agriculture.

PURPOSE: To ensure Australia is able to maintain an internationally competitive, environmentally sustainable and resilient agricultural sector by addressing the imminent opportunities and risks confronting the beekeeping and member honeybee pollination dependent industries.

