

# Submission to Quarantine and Biosecurity Review

April 2008

This submission seeks to endorse the contents of the submission from The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, and further extend one of the points made in that submission. It relates only to the arrangements for importation of new honey bee genetic material in the form of queen bees or drone semen.

In their submission, AHBIC have drawn attention to the situation regarding the proposed closure of the Eastern Creek Quarantine facility, which would leave Australian beekeepers without any means of safely importing new genetic material, which is considered essential to the future sustainability of the industry. AHBIC's submission makes the case for moving the bee quarantine facility to the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI), and makes a recommendation regarding the federal costing of that move and its ongoing operational costs.

It should be noted that the current Eastern Creek, and proposed EMAI facilities are not truly national facilities since the AQIS operational guidelines (reproduced in AHBIC's submission), do not permit the genetic material passing out of the quarantine facility, entry into Western Australia.

Western Australia has had a strict Biosecurity protocol in place for some 20 or more years to prevent entry of bee diseases and parasites from both Eastern Australia and overseas. Whilst to date, this has been successful in regard to preventing entry of European Foulbrood disease which is endemic on the eastern seaboard, it has not prevented the entry of Small Hive Beetles, also endemic on the east coast. The microsporidian, *Nosema ceranae*, now recognised as well established in eastern Australia, appears also to have been blocked from entry to WA by this Biosecurity protocol. Given these facts, it is unlikely that WA will ever relax its attitude towards access of honeybees or queen bees from eastern Australia.

**The downside to this strict quarantine barrier, is that access for imported genetic material into WA, is also denied.**

One route to overcome this problem, visualised by industry as low risk, was seen to be via the import of honeybee semen. In preparation for using this avenue, the WA Beekeeper's Association facilitated Ms Susan Cobey, an acknowledged world expert, to travel from the USA to conduct 2 Instrumental Insemination training schools in WA in 2005. This resulted in a number of industry participants acquiring the specialised equipment and developing the skills to perform these procedures. Instrumental insemination of queen bees is now an integral technique in the reproduction of breeding stock in at least 4 apiary businesses in WA.

However, imports of honeybee semen into Australia from overseas have been totally blocked, because Biosecurity Australia has yet to complete an Import Risk Assessment which has been in progress since June 2002.

(AHBIC's draft submission to this review failed to discuss this situation, and I do regard this as a serious omission).

It should be noted that, during the time in which BA has been considering this matter, the New Zealand authorities completed a similar import risk analysis process, resulting in successful semen imports, on a case-by-case basis, to augment honeybee breeding within the NZ industry.

I am recently advised on good authority, that BA have held up the completion of this risk assessment process "because of recent issues with colony collapse disorder and Africanised genetics". I find this strange, because those same problems would impact on importation of genetic material in the form of queen bees through the AQIS controlled Eastern Creek facility, yet those risks appear to have been successfully managed, such that those imports can, and do, proceed.

Previously, BA have advised that the IRA on honeybee semen could not proceed "because of higher priority projects, and insufficient resources".

Biosecurity Australia is clearly obfuscating on this issue, and there are many in our industry, who consider that this issue is long overdue for resolution.

I urge the review committee to address this unsatisfactory state of affairs which is handicapping the industry in its ability to plan and progress, and which is of particular concern to WA beekeepers who currently have no ability to import new genetic material.

At the state level, the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA), successfully completed an Import Risk Analysis for honeybee semen import from NSW, in response to an application. However that import has still not proceeded due to problems in obtaining DAFWA's approval for the proposed post entry quarantine site, and the high costs associated with inspection and testing.

(The IRA requires the establishment of a post entry quarantine facility conforming to AUSVET plan specifications, i.e a 10 km radius bee-free zone. Colonies headed by queens which have received the imported semen must remain there in quarantine isolation for a minimum of 12 months, and be subjected to a large number of inspections and full sampling and laboratory testing at each inspection during that time.)

These provisions are very onerous and expensive, and are considered by the proponents to be a real disincentive to proceed, which, after so much preparatory

work and negotiations with 5 state and federal government agencies over a period of 3 years, is a very disappointing outcome.

In summary therefore, WA beekeepers have had no access to new genetic material for over 20 years. They currently cannot import either queen bees or semen from overseas, or queen bees from eastern Australia. Whilst they potentially can import semen from NSW, the post entry quarantine restrictions are horrendously onerous and expensive.

This leaves the WA industry seriously disadvantaged, and arguably unsustainable in the longer term.

There are solutions to this impasse. These are:-

1. BA could approve semen imports specifically from NZ into WA. Since NZ is free of European Brood Disease, and as we understand it, free of Africanised genes and colony collapse disorder, the current WA requirements for extensive post entry quarantine would be unnecessary.
2. AQIS could duplicate the proposed EMAI quarantine facility at a suitable site in WA to permit import of queen bees, just as occurs in eastern Australia. This would have increased cost implications for AQIS, but the cost to the importers is affordable. The protocols are already established at Eastern Creek. Furthermore, there are a number of suitable sites that could potentially be used. (eg Murdoch University Veterinary school, AQIS Byford, HMAS Leuwin Naval base on Garden Island.)
3. AQIS could place a truly national quarantine facility in WA instead of at EMAI, since there are no restrictions on movement of queens or grafted material to the eastern seaboard. This would be unpopular with eastern states importers since it would result in inconvenience and higher costs to them, but it is technically possible.
4. AQIS could modify the operational protocol for the proposed facility at EMAI, such that genetic material could move on to WA after satisfying post entry quarantine requirements there, at both the national and WA level. This is technically possible to establish, but it may prove difficult to maintain EFB freedom within the facility over time. Consequently it is unlikely to prevent WA requiring extensive post entry quarantine in addition, when the material is moved to WA.

Clearly option 1 provides the most sensible, cost effective outcome for WA's unique situation, and would not impact on the eastern states beekeepers' access to new genetic material through the proposed EMAI facility.

I urge the review committee to consider this matter and endeavour to resolve it favourably for WA beekeepers. In the absence of a legal and affordable avenue to import new genetic material, it is highly likely that eventually, illegal uncontrolled importation will occur, as happened in eastern Australia, and that could have devastating outcomes for Australian agriculture, horticulture and the nation as a whole.

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