

AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

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SUBMISSION ON

THE WHITE PAPER

COMPETITIVENESS OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Introduction

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc (AHBIC) is the peak body for beekeeping in Australia. Its members are:-

Queensland Beekeepers Association Inc. (QBA)
New South Wales Apiarists Association Inc. (NSWAA)
Victorian Apiarists Association Inc. (VAA)
Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc. (TBA)
South Australian Apiarists Association Inc. (SAAA)
Beekeepers Section – West Australian Farmers Federation (WAFF)
Honey Packers and Marketers Association of Australia (HPMAA)
National Council of Pollination Associations (NCPA)
Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association (AQBBA)
Associated Members

Comments

The beekeeping industry in Australia is an important part of the agricultural sector. Whilst the value of honey produced in Australia is between \$90-100 million the value of crops which benefit from pollination by honey bees is valued at between \$4-6 billion. Thus honey bees are responsible for ensuring that in many cases there would be no crop without the pollination provided. In other crops, enhanced yields are possible through honey bee pollination.

Thus it can be seen that the competitiveness of the agricultural industry through better yields adds to the competitiveness of the agricultural industry.

Having read the Issues Paper, AHBIC would submit that the following subjects need to be addressed in the white paper.

- Pesticides are an important part of agriculture. If used incorrectly they will cause losses of honey bees which have occurred in the past. It is crucial that the label directions for the use of the pesticide are able to be enforced. Recently, beekeepers suffered bee kills in New South Wales and the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA), when investigating these kills, said the label is only there as a guide and no enforcement of the label direction by the applicator is possible.

Yes, pesticides are an important part of competitiveness but they should also be applied as per label instruction and there should also be a way of enforcing those label directions.

- For the beekeeping industry to be able to supply bee hives for pollination of crops and thus increasing yields, the bee hives need to be able to built up in strength prior to the pollination event and also be rejuvenated after the pollination event. Pollination is hard on the bee hive and loss of colony strength is usually suffered during pollination.

Within Australia, some public land managers are looking to try to exclude bee hives from these public lands. This is despite the fact that bee hives have been placed on many of these areas for a hundred years or more. Beekeepers need access to these public lands to either build bee numbers for pollination or rejuvenate them after pollination.

To keep the competitiveness within the agricultural sector through the pollination service the honey bees provide, beekeepers need access to these public lands.

- Genetically Modified crops (GM) are being heralded as part of keeping the agricultural industry competitive. Whilst the beekeeping industry is not against the GM crops as such, there is a side effect that does affect our industry.

In a good season, as much as 50% of the honey produced in Australia is exported. One of the important markets is the European Union (EU). When honey bees work GM crops, the honey is not classed as GM but the pollen that is included is classed as GM. The EU will only accept honey that has the GM component classified as a food within the EU. Recently our industry was advised that Taiwan is now adopting the same rules as the EU. Taiwan is also an important export destination for Australian honey.

So any GM pollen in honey that is not from a crop classified as a food will mean rejection of that honey. Honey bees could be working a non GM crop such as canola but if there was GM canola within flying range, the honey will then have GM pollen in it.

The major GM canola crop used in Australia is to be classified as a food by the EU but we have other GM crops that are not classified as food by the EU.

For Australian beekeepers to remain competitive in export markets, any new GM crop put up for approval in Australia, which honey bees work, must be classified as a food by the EU before that crop is allowed to be grown in Australia.

- The competitiveness of the agricultural industry relies on being able to compete on an equal footing with any product that is imported. Within the honey industry we have cases of product being imported from overseas as honey but when AHBIC has had that product analysed it is shown to be not honey but corn syrup.

Complaints have been submitted to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). The length of time to have these complaints resolved is excessively long in our industry's opinion. The product still remains on sale to the public despite it being obviously mislabelled. The public is being sold a product that is not what the label says. It also means our industry is being financially disadvantaged by having to compete with a cheap product that is not what it says it is.

Complaints were also lodged with the Health Department in the State from where the product was distributed but despite our pointing out it breached the Australian and New Zealand Food Standard, action would not be taken as it was not deemed a threat to public health.

For agriculture to maintain its competitiveness there must be a way found to be able to quickly process these complaints and have a way of removing the mislabelled product from the self.

- Another issue is country of origin labelling. There is an inquiry by The House of Representatives Agriculture and Industry Committee on this subject, which AHBIC will be putting in a submission, but it should also be recognised within the White Paper that this can affect competitiveness.

There is royal jelly imported from China, packaged here in Australia then exported as "Made in Australia". The product name should reflect the country of origin. If it is not produced in Australia, then it should not be labelled "Made in Australia". In one case, residues were found in the product by Japan and the story was put around the world that Australia was using this particular chemical when in fact it is not.

Thus Australia's competitiveness on the world market can be affected by an imported product being sold overseas as Australian particularly when it has residues in it.

Within Australia products can be sold where the ingredients say "Made from Australian and Imported Products". There is no indication as to how much of each makes up the product. It could be 95% Australian and 5% Imported but it could be the other way i.e. 95% Imported and 5% Australian. This issue needs to be addressed to allow the public to make a decision on what they are buying.