

**Submission
No 240**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

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Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

FOUNDED 1892 REG No. A8347 ABN 88 895 471 810

Victoria's Peak Beekeeping Body – “For the Advancement of Apiculture”
Publishers of *THE AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL* (Monthly) since 1918

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29 July, 2012

The Director,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney, N.S.W., 2000

Re: Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales

SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Representing the Victorian honey bee industry, the Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc. (V.A.A.) expresses interest in the above Inquiry being undertaken by the No. 5 Standing Committee. It does so having consulted the New South Wales Apiarists' Association Inc.. This submission concentrates on seasonal migration by Victorian beekeepers to the public lands of the N.S.W. Riverine Bio-region.
- 1.2 The Australian commercial beekeeping industry is highly mobile and seasonal, its migratory mode of operation being largely shaped by the sporadic flowering characteristics of mainly eucalypt species flora, including the river red gum and associated species of the nation's Riverine Bio-regions. For example, red gum (*E. camaldulensis*) on average has a “general” flowering mid summer about once every third year, to which beekeepers migrate respective apiaries, each time staying for a period of about six (6) weeks. In effect, bee sites in river red gum forests and woodlands, over say a ten (10) year period, are stocked with apiaries for a cumulative total of about 18 weeks out of a total of 520 weeks.
- 1.3 The standing committee will appreciate therefore that state borders are not a barrier to honey production by migratory beekeepers of whichever state of origin they may be. The migratory beekeepers of N.S.W. and Victoria extensively work the Riverina Bio-Region. They operate, as floristic opportunities arise, from licensed public land bee sites, and by private treaty from freehold land. Accordingly, many Victorian beekeepers are legally required to register with N.S.W. Agriculture in order to partly run their businesses in N.S.W.. Similarly, N.S.W. beekeepers work the public lands of Victoria from time to time.

- 1.4 On 1 July 2010, the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Act 2010 came into effect.

On 1 January 2011, the National Park Estate (South West Cypress Reservations) Act 2010 came into effect.

As part of these pieces of legislation, the dedication of certain State Forests was revoked and those lands were subsequently transferred to the administration of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (N.P.W.S.) and managed under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (N.P.W. Act). Those lands are either reserved under the N.P.W. Act or vested in Part 11 of the N.P.W. Act.

- 1.5 Implementation of N.S.W. N.P.W.S. Beekeeping Policy by the Service since the revocation has resulted in reducing the levels of traditional access by migratory beekeepers of both states to the bio-region's public lands, based on the precautionary view that honey bees *per sae* (*A. mellifera*) are an exotic species, and may impact adversely on the reproductive success of native flora and fauna. This submission requests the standing committee consider that migratory beekeeping, operating under seasonal, non limiting floristic abundance, is a practice not adverse to the successful, long term reproductive success of native flora and fauna, is a practice therefore compatible with these primary objectives of nature conservation, and that future management of the bio-region's public lands needs to provide for the restoration of traditional levels of access through appropriate licencing arrangements.

2. REVOKING OF FORMER LEGISLATION 2010–2011 – IMPACTS

- 2.1 Following enactment of the superseding legislation and the dedication of certain State forests revoked, those lands were subsequently transferred to the administration of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and are currently managed under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974. Holders of former State Forest Bee Occupation Permits were advised by N.P.W.S. that all existing permits would be honoured, allowing for their renewal and transfer from time to time.
- 2.2 However, the commitment by N.P.W.S. did not take into account all country traditionally utilized by migratory honey production industry participants. Traditional bee site locations throughout the N.S.W. bio-region, unoccupied formally at the time of land management transfer, have been lost to industry.
- 2.3 The nature of migratory honey production, geared heavily to the sporadic flowering characteristics of eucalypt species, (sometimes many years elapsing between flowerings) is such that all bee sites potentially available for short, seasonal occupation, may not be licensed formally on a continual basis. The elimination of such country throughout the bio-region reduces industry capacity for honey production, and reduces public benefit such as addressed in following commentary.

3. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

- 3.1 The migratory Australian honey production economy is heavily reliant on the maintenance of traditional access to the vast range of native forest systems (principally eucalypt), operating under various licencing arrangements in each state. Similarly, the Victorian migratory beekeeping industry honey production economy is about 85% dependent on access to both the public and freehold land native forest estates of Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. River red gum honey of the N.S.W. bio-region is one of the world's finest quality table honeys, densely textured, amber in colour, its aroma and flavour embodying more than a hint of caramel. The product is eagerly sought by honey packers, often attracting premium prices at the farm gate.

- 3.2 While the national farm gate value of apiary products is assessed at about \$80 million per annum, the value of structured and incidental honey bee pollination services to agriculture/horticulture production is reckoned in terms of billions of dollars, expressed through increased crop yields as a result of efficient honey bee pollination. Taking into account all insect pollinated crop industries including pasture species, independent assessment by RIRDC 2004 found that honey bees contribute directly to between \$4 billion and \$6 billion worth of agricultural production annually, and the maintenance of 11,000 jobs.
- 3.3 Pollen collection by fauna (pollination), is a reward for providing services to flowering plants, which leads to fertilization of the ovule necessary for the reproductive success of plant species, including food crops. River red gum pollen collected by honey bees provides an important sources of protein and other ingredients used in the rearing of young, healthy brood (the next generation of honey bees).
- 3.4 Honey bees reared on red gum and other high quality pollens are renowned for their long term fitness durability. Always important in the management of honey bees, this factor is assuming greater public benefit significance through the maintenance of prosperous managed honey bee colonies, that in increasing numbers are being engaged by horticulture and agriculture industries to provide human and animal food crop pollination services and food security management throughout Australia. The bio-region's red gum and woodland forests melliferous (nectar and pollen) resources form an important component of the overall mosaic of floral resources utilized to maintain, season to season, vigorous managed honey bee populations which the rapidly developing honey bee crop pollination industry services sector is strategically deploying throughout farmlands of regional Australia.
- 3.5 For the information of this inquiry, in July 2008, the Victorian Environment Assessment Council, (V.E.A.C.), inquiring into the future management of Victorian River Red Gum Forests, in its final report, had this to say: *"The investigation area plays an important role in the Victorian apiculture industry contributing around one million dollars to the economy and supporting about 30 fulltime equivalent jobs. Apiculture is generally proposed to continue as a resource use in the investigation area and at existing apiary sites in recommended national parks."*

4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF MIGRATORY HONEY PRODUCTION IN NATIVE FOREST SYSTEMS

- 4.1 In Victoria, during 1991-92, testing for migratory beekeeping impact on native bees fitness took place in the Cobboboonee State Forest. The native bee fauna of south western Victoria was well known for its species diversity and populations distribution. The fauna was considered by researchers to be a good candidate for the indication of adverse impact on reproductive success as a result of resource competition during the occupation of bee sites by managed honeybees at times of occasional floral abundance.
- 4.2 The cooperatively designed and well managed study was performed by the La Trobe University (M. Schwarz et.al.). Collaborating partners included the University of Montana, U.S.A., the Victorian Department of Conservation Forests and Lands (C.F. & L.) including the Portland C.F. & L. regional office, the Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc., the Federal Council of Australian Apiarists' Association Inc., and the principal funding provider, World Wild Life Fund Australia. The study was titled – *"Assessment of Competition between Honey Bees and Native Bees"* (M. Schwarz et.al., La Trobe University 1991-92).
- 4.3 Also during the early 1990 decade, the Department of C.F. & L. was working collaboratively with the Victorian beekeeping industry and other stakeholders to develop a policy framework for beekeeping in public land, including the conserved (parks) estate. It was recognized that appropriately designed research, testing for signs of impact of managed honeybees, (distinct from effects, perceived or otherwise, of wild honeybee populations that are permanently resident in all native forest systems) needed to be performed to inform public land management and governments of the day.

- 4.4 The Cobboboonee experiment commenced in the summer of 1991. *Eucalyptus obliqua*, (messmate), a dominant species of the State Forest, was selected for the trial. Flowering copiously on average once every 3-4 years, the species was observed to set bud on new growth in the early summer of 1990, foreshadowing that floral abundance at Cobboboonee would be at its peak during mid summer, 1991, when beekeepers would begin migrating apiaries to authorized bee sites previously unoccupied for several years. Regional C.F. & L. management assistance in the selection of experimental and control sites, matching vegetation mix, and later managing the stocking of experimental sites with migrating apiaries was an important precursor function of the study. In addition, prior to experimentation proceeding, the principal scientific investigators, Schwarz and Kukuk (University of Montana, U.S.A.) were invited to, and attended, a major Honey Research Committee (a Commonwealth statutory entity) environmental workshop in Canberra and other beekeeping forums in Victoria to acquire insights to the natural dynamics that drive the operations of the Victorian migratory beekeeping industry. By the time messmate flowering had commenced in the summer of 1992, study design had become finely tuned, all stakeholders comfortable with the project.
- 4.5 Study outcome provided robust support for the hypothesis that migratory honey production does not adversely impact on the reproductive success of native fauna and flora, and is a public land use compatible with these objects of nature conservation. The study demonstrated an increase in the reproductive success of the four species of native bees studied, as had been expected by the hypothesis under the prevailing and abundant messmate floral conditions. This positive perturbation of the native bee populations was, and remains consistent with long term positive and negative perturbations geared to other natural dynamics including drought, fire and flood.
- 4.6 The study final report was lodged by the researchers with World Wild Life Australia. Wider publication of the report was not sought by the researchers.
- 4.7 The V.A.A. submits, study outcomes can be confidently extrapolated to other eastern Australia native forest systems, including the river red gum and associated species forests and woodlands of the N.S.W. bio-region, the subject of this submission.
- 4.8 Regarding adverse impacts on native flora of the N.S.W. bio-region deriving from foraging, managed honeybees migrated occasionally to the region, perceived by the N.P.W.S. of N.S.W. through its precautionary management approach to beekeeping, the V.A.A. submits:
- Eucalypt species flowers present their secreted nectar in broad, shallow cups, that are incapable of being damaged by foraging honey bees.
 - Pollen collection by honey bees similarly occurs without damage to eucalypt inflorescence.
 - Pollination efficiency (fertilisation) of eucalypt species by honey bees is well known and utilised by public land managers in some circumstances.
 - The reproductive success of river red gum and associated eucalypt species throughout the N.S.W. bio-region is most likely enhanced by foraging, managed honey bees migrated to take advantage of periodic floral abundances.
- 4.9 Regarding the early to late spring flowering native herbaceous plants of the N.S.W. bio-region, there is no capacity for adverse impact during migrations to work river red gum and associated riverine species because respective flowering periods and bee site occupancies do not coincide.

4.10 The V.A.A. submits it understands the obligations of the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service to protect threatened species, communities and critical habitat in N.S.W., under the provisions of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. The V.A.A. submits, the working of the N.S.W. bio-region described above by managed honey bees occasionally migrated during periods of floral abundance does not impact adversely on the long term reproductive success of native flora and fauna, and that the working of the region's flora at restored traditional levels of access would not compromise land management legislative requirements to protect the region's ecological and other regional values.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 In providing the above particulars and commentary for the information of the Standing Committee, it does so from a position of respect and deference towards a neighbouring state's public land management jurisdictions, inclusive of the N.S.W. Apiarists' Association Inc. executive council, which through its Beekeeping Industry Consultative Committee liaises at a policy level with the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Even so, as previously indicated, state borders are not a barrier to migratory beekeeping, some operations working from time to time under various eastern state jurisdictions. This is the imperative which has generated the Victorian industry interest in this Inquiry by Standing Committee No. 5.
- 5.2 Finally, the V.A.A. submits that migratory honey production is a classic model for sound, long term sustainable use of public land assets, accommodating not only desirable conservation outcomes, but generating the capacity for the industry to deliver enormous public benefit through the enhancement of food security for this nation and its people.

Yours faithfully

Linton Briggs,
Secretary,
V.A.A. Inc. Resources Committee