

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Queen Bee Exporters Pty. Ltd.

Name: Mr Warren Taylor

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Re: The Management of Public Lands and It's Relevance to the Beekeeping Industry

The Beekeeping Industry is vital to Australia's agricultural and horticultural industries through the pollination of many crops. Beekeepers must have access to floral areas to strengthen hives and in some cases as a location to escape insecticidal poisoning and in particular in period of locust plagues.

Slowly the industry is being strangled as state forests get converted to national parks and some L.H.P.A.'s restrict bees on travelling stock routes.

In a world where many countries are able to recognise the value of honeybee it seems that Australian governments do not have the same attitude. Many countries provide subsidies to beekeepers and some countries such as U.S. place a heavy import duty on cheap foreign honey. It is the duty of this committee as part of this inquiry to see how the better management of public lands can assist NSW beekeepers. Already that new Victorian govt is giving bee sites on public lands back to the beekeeping industry.

For over 50 years the Forestry Commission has allocated 1.5km grids to individual beekeepers and subject to suitable roads through that grid has allowed beekeepers to place multiple loads of hives within that grid.

Come the National Parks and beekeepers are being restricted to only one load/grid. This has resulted in many loads of bees without home. Take our company as an example. For years we held 21 grid sites in Goonoo State Forest and on these sites we placed our 50 loads of bees. Since the takeover by National Parks I am limited to 21 loads and have nowhere to place the other 29 loads. This shortage of bee sites has created fights between beekeepers as people try to find sites for the extra loads.

Recently many thousands of hives were poisoned with Permethrin on the South Coast and this will have been caused by a beekeeper who was unable to get sites for his hives. This winter Spotted gum has flowered on the South Coast and many beekeepers have taken hives to the area to prepare their hives for pollination of Almonds at Hillston and Robinvale. Admittedly a small number of beekeeper hold an excessive number of sites, forced to do so by the restriction on hive numbers allowed to be placed on National park areas which were previously State Forest. It was this small number of beekeepers whose hives were poisoned by some person who could not book any area for his own hives.

Rarely does a beekeeping operation sell walk in - walk out. Generally a person starts with a small number of hives as a sideline and gradually builds up numbers until he has sufficient hives to allow him to go full time commercial beekeeping. In the interim he has to accumulate a portfolio of sites on public and private land. This is proving difficult and is restricting growth of these smaller beekeepers.

It is paramount that this inquiry make decisions that will allow for the sustainable use of public land by beekeepers.

Obviously the industry would like to see those National Parks with minor environmental value to be returned to State Forests for beekeeping, timber harvesting, firewood and other compatible uses.

In the event that the inquiry does not reach this conclusion then we suggest that allocation of bee sites be according to the grid system which has worked well for over 50 years and still operates in state forests. Beekeepers should be allowed to stock each grid according to their own judgement.

To do nothing will result in further cases of damage to beehives by persons who are not about to operate and grow their beekeeping business.

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A mass insecticide

SAMANTHA TOWNSEND
REGIONAL REPORTER

BEEKEEPERS are feeling the sting after about 1000 hives were poisoned — with a damage bill of \$150,000.

The hives were sprayed with poison in Murrumbidgee National Park and around Batemans Bay on the south coast over the weekend.

Apiarists discovered piles of dead bees around their hives on Monday morning. Neil Bingley, who lost 36 hives, said most of them were field bees — or worker bees — which meant the hives would be out of operation until at least spring.

"We aren't sure if the queen bee was killed. If she is alive then the hives might recover," Mr Bingley said.

Honey already in the hives — destined for supermarket shelves — was rendered inedible by the poisoning.

Pat Roberts, who was worst affected losing 240 hives, said he was devastated by the apparent sabotage.

"We just hope whoever is doing this won't do any more."

ation beekeeper, whose sons Stephen and Ian also work with him, employs eight families and said he would have to consider putting one off because of the poisoning.

"Picking one is going to be hard," Mr Roberts said.

However, with a total of 5000 hives, he said overall supply would not be affected and — luckily for those who enjoy honey in their tea or on their toast — it won't affect the price on the supermarket shelf.

Mr Roberts said the honey from his lost hives was to be used in a brand sold at Woolworths.

The Department of Primary Industries and the Environmental Protection Agency were conducting tests yesterday, with police appealing for information to help identify and track down those responsible.

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council said Australians consume about 1kg of honey per person. Council deputy chairman Ed Planken said there could be more as some smaller operators did not declare how much they produce.

Mr Planken said the poisoning was a significant loss to producers but would not impact on the price.

"This is not the first time something like this happened. They have been stolen in the past or destroyed," he said. "I've been in the industry 30 years and it doesn't happen regularly, but it does happen."



Pat Roberts' son Stephen surveys the mass of dead bees that have died.

Pointless killing stings

Bees are among the most complex and fascinating of all insects, with their intricate social orders and their vital role in plant pollination.

From a selfish human perspective, their production of delicious honey is also an obvious plus.

Yet evidently not everyone is a bee fan. About 1000 commercial beehives in the Batemans Bay area have recently been attacked by a bee killer who sprayed the hives with poison.

Monday morning revealed the full extent of the destruction — tens of thousands of dead bees plus hive after hive of ruined honey.

Some criminal acts are so selfish and pointless that they cause genuine shock. An act of

theft is understandable (although not forgivable) because of the obvious motive. A crime of passion may result from momentary loss of reason.

But what kind of idiot kills bees?

Additionally, beekeepers have lost about \$150,000 in damages. Each individual commercial hive may not be large, but they are intense operations. Multiplied up to 1000 times and you can appreciate the extent of the harm that has been wrought.

Possibly the most upsetting thing is that beekeeping relies on public trust. Hives are left on public land with an understanding that they won't be stolen or wrecked. Some of that trust is now permanently gone.

Honey war sting feared in beehive poisonings



Sprayed ... police are investigating the poisoning of south coast bee hives including the loss of about 230 by Steve Roberts, below. Photo: Graham Tidy

Stephanie Gardiner

DETECTIVES on the NSW south coast are investigating the possibility of vicious rivalry in the honey industry after a massive and deliberate chemical attack on hundreds of beehives.

About 740 hives were sprayed with a toxic chemical at the weekend, killing tens of thousands of bees and poisoning honey worth \$150,000.

Several different beekeeping businesses were affected near Batemans Bay, some of them in remote bushland sites up to 40 kilometres apart.

One company, Australian Rainforest Honey, which provides honey to Woolworths around the country, said about 240 of its 5000 hives had been sprayed, killing all the bees



inside. "All I know is they've been sprayed - all the bees are dead," a company spokeswoman, Wendy Roberts, said. She said

the offender appeared to know where to find the hives and how to poison them efficiently.

"I'd say they would have had to have a good knowledge of bees."

The honey on some of the hives was ready to be harvested, but is now contaminated. The company estimated the loss was tens of thousands of dollars.

"It's going to affect us very, very immensely," Ms Roberts said. "We're depending on this year to fulfil our commitment with Woolworths. And it's just devastating. These people have got no consideration."

The company's bees were also used to pollinate almonds, and the attacks may have a secondary impact on that industry.

The beekeeping industry can be competitive, but there was

no evidence that sabotage from rival honey producers had taken place.

The police have urged anyone who may have seen suspicious activity near properties on the Western Distributor, Iron Bark Ridge and Clyde Ridge roads to come forward.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries has taken samples of dead bees and poisoned honey from the hives to be analysed at its forensic laboratory operated by the Environmental Protection Agency in Lidcombe.

"We are testing for anything suspicious, such as pesticides," a spokeswoman said. "The testing might take a week."

Although poisoning seemed very likely, the EPA is keeping an open mind to other potential causes of death.