Submission No 380

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Victorian Farmers Federation

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This submission focusses on the impact of public land management in New South Wales on migratory beekeepers in Victoria.

Victorian Farmers Federation

31 August 2012

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales

To the Director,

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) wishes to provide a submission to the Management of public land in New South Wales (Inquiry). Please find attached the VFF submission.

If you wish to clarify any points in the submission do not hesitate to contact Jacob McElwee on 03

Yours sincerely,

Peter Tuohey
President

Submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales

By

Victorian Farmers Federation

Date August 2012

Foreword

The Victorian Farmers Federation is Australia's largest state farmer organisation, and the only recognised, consistent voice on issues affecting rural Victoria.

The VFF consists of an elected Board of Directors, a member representative Policy Council to set policy and eight commodity groups representing dairy, grains, livestock, horticulture, chicken meat, pigs, flowers and egg industries.

Farmers are elected by their peers to direct each of the commodity groups and are supported by Melbourne-based staff.

Each VFF member is represented locally by one of the 230 VFF branches across the state and through their commodity representatives at local, district, state and national levels. The VFF also represents farmers' views at many industry and government forums.

Peter Tuohey

President

1. Introduction

The VFF welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in New South Wales. While public land management in New South Wales is not something the VFF deals with regularly, we represent beekeepers for whom public land interstate is a critical resource. We understand the NSW Farmers Association has a strong interest in this review, and they will raise issues with the management of public land for beekeepers in New South Wales.

The VFF would like to raise some issues with public land management in New South Wales that have substantial negative impacts on the Victorian beekeeping industry, and identify some of the key changes that must be made to address these issues.

Our submission addresses four main areas:

- Value of the apiary industry to the economy
- Importance of New South Wales public land for Victorian bee keepers
- Loss of access to public land beekeeping sites in New South Wales
- Impact of beekeeping on public land and conservation

2. Value of the apiary industry to the economy

The direct products of the bee keeping industry are estimated to contribute $90 million to the economy per annum[1]. However, the services provided by the industry to agriculture and horticulture represent a much larger contribution, with the value of paid pollination services estimated at $1.7 billion annually[1]. Beekeepers in New South Wales and Victoria are major contributors to these economic benefits, together representing 48 percent of Australia's apiarists[1].

3. Importance of New South Wales public land for Victorian bee keepers

Bee keepers rely heavily on public land to produce honey and maintain their bee colonies between providing pollination services. To maintain a strong and healthy bee population, bees need access to adequate floral resources, which in Australia are most readily available in mature eucalypt forests. Most commercial Victorian beekeepers rely on intermittent flowering of eucalypt species. The seasonal and inter-annual opportunities for floral resources differ between Victoria and New South Wales, making access to floral resources in New South Wales critical to the maintenance of Victoria's apiary industry.

4. Impact of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Beekeeping Policy

Successive changes to public land management in New South Wales have resulted in the loss of bee sites on New South Wales public and leasehold land. The transfer of land formerly in State forest into National Park and the purchase and/or reclassification of leasehold land into national park were major contributing factors.

[1] Gordon, J. and Davis, L. 2003. Valuing Honeybee Pollination, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Project No CIE-15A, Pub No 03/077.

The impact has been worsened by the NPSW Beekeeping Policy, which states that:

> "No additional apiary sites will be approved in areas reserved or dedicated under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974. However beekeeping consents/permits current on all lands transferred to the NSW NPWS will be recognised by the Service."

When combined with changes to land tenure/management, this policy has:

- created a situation where the number of bee sites can only decrease on NPWS managed land
- caused the loss of bee sites that were not formally permitted (negotiated with private leaseholders or land managers)
- caused the loss of bee sites where permits had lapsed due to prolonged periods of low productivity during drought conditions.

Recommendation 1: Reinstate bee sites lost as a result of changed land categorisation and/or management.

Recommendation 2: Amend the NPWS Beekeeping Policy to create greater flexibility to renew lapsed licences, recognising the impact of climate variability on the productivity of bee sites.

Recommendation 3: Review the NPWS Policy that *'no additional apiary sites will be approved in areas reserved or dedicated under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974'*, considering the long-term needs of the apiary industry and the substantial economic benefits of maintaining a strong apiary industry.

The NPSW Beekeeping Policy is predicated on the potential impacts of bees on native plants and animals. This issue is addressed below.

5. Impact of beekeeping on public land and conservation

There is some debate in scientific literature regarding the impact of introduced honey bees on native pollinators. However, the critical issue to consider is the difference in the impacts of feral honey bees and managed honey bees. According to Moritz et al. (2005) feral honey bees are the principle cause of competition with other species, as opposed to managed honey bees[2].

According to the NSW Scientific Committee (2002) competition from honey bees is in two main forms; competition for tree hollows and competition for floral resources[3]. It is clear that there is scope for impacts from bees that occupy habitat on a permanent basis, thereby displacing native species. However, this is only the case for feral honey bees, not managed honey bees. Therefore, the only impact from managed honey bees would be competition for floral resources.

By nature migratory beekeepers utilise habitat during times when floral resources are not a limiting factor for populations of native species. Due to the periodic flowering of eucalypt species, the population of native pollinators would rarely be sufficient to utilise all resources available. Periodic flowering and seed set is usually a reproductive strategy to prevent seeds from being fully consumed by fauna. In this way populations of flower visiting species will not be maintained in the off-years, meaning during a flowering year there will be more resources than can be utilised. Migratory

[2] Moritz, R.F.A, Härtel, and S, Neumann, P. 2005. Global invasions of the western honeybee (Apis mellifera) and the consequences for biodiversity, Ecoscience, 12(3):289-301.
[3] NSW Scientific Committee. 2002. Competition from feral honeybees - key threatening process listing. Accessed at: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/determinations/FeralHoneybeesKTPListing.htm

beekeepers can be seen as utilising floral resources that are surplus to the requirements of native species.

Several studies have demonstrated a limited or even positive impact of bees on native bee populations (Sugden and Pyke (1991)[4]; Schwarz et al. (1992),[5]; Paini et al. (2005)[6]). Meanwhile Paton, (1996) describes the impacts on honeyeaters, with a reduction in population densities observed as a result of increased numbers of honey bees[7]. However, it is questionable whether such an impact would be sustained as a result of migratory bee keeping, with sites occupied for a short-period only once every few years.

Paton (1996) describes the impact of honey bees on native plants on the basis of various studies, which have been shown to be positive (the bees supplementing the pollination of native species) and negative (the bees less effective pollinators than native species) depending on the plant species[6]. On average however, honey bees perform a pollination function and could be expected to have a net positive impact on the reproductive success of plants.

Recommendation 4: Review the NPWS's precautionary approach to managed bees, with particular attention to differentiating the impacts of feral bees to managed bees on native biota.

[4] Sugden, E.A. and Pyke, G.H. 1991. Effects of honey bees on colonies of Exoneura asimillima, an Australian native bee. Australian Journal of Ecology 16: 171-181.
[5] Schwarz M.P., Kukuk P.F., and Gross C.L. 1992. Assessment of competition between honeybees and native bees. July progress report, World Wildlife Fund Australia.
[6] Paini, D.R., Williams M.R., and Roberts, J.D. 2005. No short-term impact of honey bees on the reproductive success of an Australian native bee. Apidologie 36 (2005) 613–621.
[7] Paton, D.C. 1996. Overview of feral and managed honeybees in Australia: distribution, abundance, extent of interactions with native biota, evidence of impacts and future research. Australian Nature Conservation Agency.