Submission No 346

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Central Victorian Apiarists Association

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SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES FROM THE CENTRAL VICTORIAN APIARISTS ASSOCIATION.

Background

The Central Victorian Apiarists Association represents approximately 100 beekeepers from throughout Central Victoria but also has membership from across the State and interstate. Many of our members use Public lands in New South Wales and we welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into Public Land management.

Our members gain their income from a mix of honey production, paid pollination services and queen bee rearing. Continued access to Public Lands is extremely important to ensure success in all beekeeping pursuits.

Importance of access to natural resources for beekeepers

Traditionally, beekeepers lease a Public Land bee site by payment of a fee to gain access to the site for a set amount of time. Often beekeepers always pay the fees to ensure continued access but some sites are taken out and fees paid for short term use. Beekeepers use each site periodically depending on the species flowering at any one time. A site may be used for a time each year or may only be used very sporadically depending on the species selection on the site and its usefulness for pollen or nectar supplies. But even a site used rarely could be very useful when the particular species is flowering and result in a large honey flow or important nutrition from pollens available to build up bees for pollination services.

The importance of pollination is gaining more recognition. Managed honeybees are now rightly being recognised as very important to food security in both Australia and throughout the World. Beekeepers provide pollination services to many industries including: nut, citrus, fruit and vegetable growers, oil crops such as canola and seed crops for both pasture and other crops. The seed production that takes place in Australia provides seed to grow food worldwide, further showing the reliance of managed honeybees for food security throughout the

world. These pollination services rely on access to natural resources to sustain the managed honey bees throughout the year.

Some pollination can adversely affect the bees and access to good quality natural resources is required for bees to build up prior to and sometimes after pollination services to maintain adequate hive strength for colony survival. The natural resources protected on Public Lands provide an excellent resource to sustain hive populations as generally there is a high species mix providing a better nutrition source for bees than one species timber areas or scattered timber on agricultural land. The importance of continued Public Land access for beekeepers can not be underestimated for a successful beekeeping future.

Attached to our submission is a copy of a report, (Gill, R. 1996, The Benefits to the Beekeeping Industry and Society from Secure Access to Public Lands and their Melliferous Resources, Honeybee Research and Development Council research report).
A small part of this report is included in the submission here, but it would be encouraged that the full report be considered as part of the inquiry into management of Public Lands in NSW.

"An overview of scientific research on the impact of honeybees on natural ecosystems was undertaken by Seeman (1994). The detail of that review will not be repeated here. By way of summary, the major claims for ecological damage imposed by commercial beekeeping activity in conserved areas include:
- *over zealous predation on limited nectar and pollen resources;*
- *displacement of native bees and other insects by honeybees;*
- *unnatural selection of some plants over others through selective pollination;*
- *competition between honeybees and native animals for natural cavities;*
- *hybridisation of native plant species;*
- *provide a vehicle for the spread of pests and pathogens; and*
- *vehicle movement spreading pathogens and damage to conserved land.*

Despite considerable research on each of these claims, none have been supported by conclusive evidence. Ettershank and Ettershank (1993), for example, examined the distribution of native bees in Tasmanian wilderness areas and found little correlation between populations in 'beekeeping areas' and other areas. Similarly, Paton (1993), found no evidence to support the displacement of native animals by honeybees in banksia heathland areas. Similarly inconclusive results have been reported by Smith and Hume (1984), Pyke and Balzer (1985), Hamilton (1988), Wapshere (1988), Lawler and Oldroyd (1994) and Oldroyd et al (1994).

Even if conclusive evidence of detrimental ecological impact could be presented, those results could not realistically be extrapolated to areas other than the site of the specific research. Given the unique nature of each and every apiary site under consideration, it is unlikely that observations or documentary proof for one area could be directly relevant to any other. In all cases, the fundamental complexity of ecological relationships will continue to elude the derivation of conclusive scientific evidence to exclusively support a policy to terminate apiary site arrangements. A policy to exclude bees is more likely, therefore, be based on political sentiment rather than irrefutable scientific evidence." (Gill, 1996)

Issues with conversion of Lands to National Park Estate

The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National Park estate or other types of conservation areas is of concern to beekeepers due to a loss of access to traditional site areas. Some of these were on Public Land and some on land that was previously privately owned.

Public Land sites are documented but beekeepers often have private access arrangements with land owners to use their farms natural resources for either honey production or to build up bees for use in pollination services. This is not usually a formal arrangement but a general agreement between the beekeeper and land owner.

A main concern with the changes of land managers is the loss of sites that has occurred. Private sites need to be documented and transferred to the Public Land

Managers and all Public Land sites should be reinstated on land that has been converted to National Park.

The only sites that are currently in New South Wales National Parks are sites that were currently leased by a beekeeper when the State Forest was converted to National Park. All sites that were available in State Forests and Private Land should be made available on land that has been converted to National Park. As already stated some sites are not always leased as they are only used sporadically. These sites are still very important for beekeeper livelihoods and they need to be listed for future use to ensure successful management of honey bees.

We would like to see that all sites that have been lost to industry when lands have been converted to National Parks are reinstated as soon as possible to assist beekeeper viability into the future. Also, if any future land management changes occur it should be ensured that beekeeper access to sites is protected.

Issues with Public Land Management

Maintained access roads

It must be assured that beekeepers that have sites within Public Land can always access these sites when required. Instances have occurred where beekeepers have had difficulties with access due to a variety of reasons including: locked gates, locks on gates being changed with no notification, construction of drains that are difficult for trucks to negotiate, barricades being placed across tracks and bridges and roads not being maintained to a safe level for truck access.

Beekeepers have always maintained the importance of a good road network through Public Land which provides important access in emergencies, such as bushfires. Problems highlighted above could be very detrimental in an emergency situation. A well maintained road can also provide a fire break to assist in fire suppression activities. In any Public Land management changes beekeepers would like assurance that access will be guaranteed and road networks maintained to a high level for increased safety for all users.

Cleared Site areas

A concern with sites situated in National Parks is the ability of a beekeeper to maintain a safe cleared area to place down bees and work the bees on the sire area. With periodic use bee sites can become overgrown because of natural regeneration, particularly if a planned burn or bushfire has occurred across the site area.

Currently, beekeepers are not allowed to clear bee sites in National Parks. This can create obvious problems for beekeepers with overgrown sites not providing a beekeeper with enough cleared space to place hives down safely.

It is also increasing the risk of the hives being lost in bushfires if an adequate cleared area is not maintained around the hives. A well maintained cleared bee site can also be useful in an emergency situation providing a turning or bypass point for vehicles and a safer meeting area for emergency personnel.

Bee Site Management arrangements

Concerns have been raised about current and future bee site management arrangements. Difficulties have occurred in contacting the relevant bee site manager for different public lands with regular changes in office locations or land managers occurring.

Logging in State Forests

Logging in State Forests can detrimentally affect a beekeepers access to the natural resources of their bee sites. Coups are harvested to less than 5% of canopy cover resulting in the biggest and most beneficial trees for beekeepers being removed. The poor trees that are left are not very beneficial to beekeepers as generally the older, larger trees provide the majority of nectar for honey production. If a bee site is located within a logging coup it could be greatly reduced in value for the beekeeper for many years after logging has occurred.

Another concern for beekeepers after logging is the change in species mix that can occur within the forest. This can altar the usefulness of a particular site depending on what species regenerates after logging.

Timing of logging operations can also impact on beekeepers. If timber harvesting is going to occur when a species is flowering then beekeepers are requested to move their bees off the site to allow harvesting to occur. Beekeepers pay their site fees usually annually and on an ongoing basis whether or not they actually use the site each year. As explained, due to Eucalypts not always flowering each year some sites may only be useful to beekeepers every 3 or 4 years and sometimes much longer due to particular species or climatic conditions. It is important therefore that when beekeepers wish to make use of a site that their access should not be prohibited due to other operations such as logging within the Public Lands. Timber harvesting operations are not reliant on whether a tree is flowering or not and timing of these type of operations should be more flexible to allow beekeepers to have access to the natural resources of their site area.

Fuel Reduction Burning

Similarly to logging, fuel reduction burns can also result in a species mix being changed within forests and timing can negatively impact on beekeepers. Continued Autumn burns, which are the current focus, will result in changes to the forest species mix. Science has shown that alternating between Spring and Autumn fuel reduction burns will result in a better mix of species germinating and being able to survive and grow.

Beekeepers have also experienced conflict with fuel reduction burns being undertaken at times when highly valued species are flowering and providing nectar or pollen resources. The burns have meant beekeepers have been unable to access their sites or make use of the floral resources which their bee site is meant for.

If fuel reduction burns result in a large area of a site area being burnt it also reduces the value of that site to a beekeeper for many years until species have

successfully regenerated. As discussed though, it can also result in a species change occurring on the site which could make the site less valuable to the beekeeper.

Beekeepers would like to see more planning for fuel reduction burns so they are not conducted when valuable nectar and pollen trees are in bud or flowering. This would assist beekeepers to have continued access to high quality natural resources to maintain hive strength and allow production of honey.

Chemical use for pest/weed management

Research work being undertaken throughout the world is showing concern at the affects on bees of a variety of chemical types used to suppress both pest plants and animals. In future management of Public Lands, beekeepers would like assurance that chemicals that can have a negative impact on honeybees will not be used. This is particularly important in bee site areas where bees may come in direct contact with the chemicals. Public Land resources usually provide the highest quality nectar and pollen supplies and these are essential for well maintained hives to produce honey or provide pollination services. Exposure of bees to chemicals on these Public Land bee sites will greatly diminish the value of these sites to beekeepers.

Conflict of use in Public Land

Occasionally problems have arisen when conflict of use has occurred on Public Lands. Examples can be when a picnic or camping ground is developed close to an existing bee site area. A beekeeper is required to place their hives in a specified area and can not move the hives further from the picnic area to alleviate any risk to the public coming in contact with the bee hives. Management needs to ensure that these situations do not occur so that beekeepers continue to have access to their bee site.

Conclusions

In closing, beekeepers have always been a proud user of our natural resources and believe that we are truly sustainable users of the forests. Managed bee hives making use of the pollen and nectar supplies have not been shown to be detrimental to the natural resource. Beekeepers are concerned with the conservation of our natural resources. We would like to ensure they are effectively managed to ensure sustainability of our forest areas for future generations, both for beekeepers to access and for all to enjoy.

CVAA hopes that information provided in this submission assists the Committee to understand beekeeper concerns and issues with management of Public Lands in New South Wales. We would be available to further discuss our concerns or to answer any questions of the Committee if required. Thank you for considering our submission in your inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales.

This submission has been authorised by the Executive Committee of the Central Victorian Apiarists Association.

Prepared on behalf of the Central Victorian Apiarists Association by:

Secretary Central Victorian Apiarists Association
PO Box 15 Ararat Victoria 3377