

MEDIA RELEASE

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New measures to protect our bee population should be introduced immediately

The key findings of a new report that calls for drastically improving how Australia protects its bee population and the \$1.7 billion horticultural industry that relies on it should be implemented as soon as possible according to nation's almond industry.

A Federal Parliament committee report tabled in Canberra on Monday has recommended \$50 million per annum be provided for biosecurity measures and industry research. The report also recommends creating a national centre for honey bee and pollination industry research, training and extension.

The almond industry welcomes this report entitled "*More Than Honey: the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries*", which recognises the importance of pollination and provides effective recommendations to address the range of issues currently facing both the honeybee industry and pollination dependent industries.

ABA chief executive officer Julie Haslett said today that the report could not have been better timed, given the news that the *Varroa destructor* mite, which could have devastating impact on Australia's bee population, has recently been found in Papua New Guinea.

"Australia currently operates a National Sentinel Hive Program to protect our bees, but this report has identified a need for this operation to be enhanced and complemented by a range of other initiatives," said Ms Haslett.

Ms Haslett said the *Varroa destructor* mite has already severely impacted honeybee populations around the world, affecting industries as diverse as almonds, apples and pears, avocados, melons, dried prunes, kiwifruit, summer fruits and vegetables.

"If *Varroa* reaches Australia, the feral honeybee populations that are so important for pollination would be wiped out and pollination of fruit and vegetables would become completely dependent on managed honeybee services," she said.

Ms Haslett said there are insufficient honeybee hives currently available to provide such services, and the management of honeybees would be made more difficult and costly due to the presence of the mite.

"The general community would be detrimentally impacted by the long term impacts on food supply and pricing, and home gardeners would not have their fruit and vegetables pollinated.

"Given the complex and broad reaching consequences of a potential incursion affecting honeybees, there is a strong argument for the Federal Government to implement the key recommendations of this report as a matter of urgency."

Background:

Varroa destructor – a threat to Australian horticulture

- Australia is the last major beekeeping country free from *Varroa destructor*.
- A destruction of wild honeybee population would dramatically affect the following industries: almonds, apples and pears, avocados, melons, dried prunes, summer fruits and vegetables, as well as home grown fruit and vegetables.
- In Australia, the spread of *Varroa* is expected to be fast over long distances because of the migratory nature of the beekeeping industry.
- Honeybees are the key pollinator in some crops, particularly in horticulture and an important pollinator in others, including some pasture species and broadacre crops.
- There are around 500,000 commercial bee hives in Australia. Of these some 102,000 are used for paid pollination and between 80,000 and 100,000 provide pollination services on a mutually beneficial basis (honey production). The demand for paid pollination is forecast to increase to around 222,000 hives by 2011, reflecting a substantial increase in demand from the almond industry for pollinating trees now in the ground.
- It is estimated that a *Varroa* incursion occurring in 2011, for example, would increase the demand for paid pollination by 51,000 hives, suggesting a total demand of some 272,000 hives. Such an increase in demand would push hive hire prices from an estimated \$72 in 2011 (without *Varroa*) to \$220/hive (with *Varroa*). Currently hire prices are around \$60/hive.
- Pollination Australia is the industry alliance of the honeybee industry and pollination dependent industries that was formed to address the common interests of commercial beekeepers and those industries dependent on honeybee pollination.
- Pollination Australia also aims to outline a research and development program to ensure future pollination of Australian crops.
- Since 2000, the Federal Government has operated the National Sentinel Hive Program at various airports and seaports across Australia, with responsibility transferring from AQIS to the Chief Veterinary Officer.

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