Introduction

The Australian beekeeping industry is an important agricultural industry with an estimated gross value of $88 million (2012-13 estimate). Beekeepers also provide indirect benefits to the broader agricultural economy through the provision of pollination services valued between $4-6 billion. The true value of beekeeping in maintaining the health and resilience of the Australian agricultural economy is therefore significant, extending well beyond its direct economic contribution.

Importance of public lands

Public lands provide important seasonal floral resources for Australia’s migrating beekeepers. With one third of Australia’s native forests located on public lands, and an additional 40% on crown leased land, access to these areas underpins production for the industry.

Forests and woodlands provide up to 80% of pollen and nectar resources, with between 70-90% of honey production across south east and south west Australia reliant on the flowering tree and understory resources of forested areas, primarily located on public lands. Floristic diversity on public land is not only important for honey production, but also provides a means to build up hives prior to and post pollination.

The continued productivity and viability of the beekeeping industry is therefore contingent upon maintaining flexible and ongoing access to apiary sites located on public lands. This is particularly important in drought periods or following floods or fires, where beekeepers require additional flexibility to find alternative food resources for the survival of their bees.

Importance of migration

In order to optimise production across seasons, it is necessary for beekeepers to migrate hives across landscapes when seeking the most productive sources of pollen and nectar. Hive migration will be planned to coincide with peaks in flowering of key plants, typically occurring over a two to four month period. Production is predominantly from eucalypt, angophora and corymbia tree species, although acacias, banksias and other species are also important. Variability in Australian weather conditions affect budding and flower patterns of flora and consequently pollen and nectar levels, requiring beekeepers to maintain their production through a constant state of migration.

Migration across public land

Migrating hives between different public land tenures can present significant challenges for beekeepers, because each type of tenure will have different management objectives and licencing requirements. Migrating hives interstate is even more complicated because comparable land tenures, such as ‘National Park’, may not have the same management objectives or licencing requirements in different States, due to differing State/Territory legislation. Ensuring that interstate migration satisfies the relevant state biosecurity procedures and approval requirements is another factor that complicates migration for apiarists.

Figure 1 summarises the public lands tenures for each Australian State and Territory.

In pursuing the dynamic floral resources required to maintain honey production, apiarists face an increasingly complex and challenging environment when negotiating access to the range of public land tenures, on which these resources occur. It is therefore important that apiarists have a current knowledge of the policies that affect beekeeping across the Australian States and Territories so that they can plan future migration activities effectively. This factsheet summarises the key public land tenures and associated management objectives in relation to beekeeping for New South Wales.
Beekeeping in New South Wales

New South Wales is the largest contributor to the national beekeeping industry, with 28.5% of the nation’s beekeepers contributing 41% of the total production. This is primarily due to the concentration of productive eucalypt forests. Beekeeping in New South Wales is regulated by the Apiaries Act 1985 No.6. This Act specifies that all beekeepers must be registered before hives can be placed on any public (or private) land. The New South Wales Department of Primary Industries is responsible for ensuring that beekeepers maintain a current registration.

The classification of Crown lands in New South Wales is reasonably complex. The core public land tenures and their relation to the access by beekeepers are summarised in the following table. Further detail, including the legislative basis and registration requirements is contained in the project document Compatibility of Management Objectives on Public Lands and Beekeeping prepared by GHD for RIRDC (PRJ-009102).

Figure 1: Main public land tenure categories by State/Territory

New South Wales Beekeeping Policy Documents

The Beekeeping Code of Practice for New South Wales specifies key conditions to ensure that apiarist activity will be compatible with a range of land uses, and to ensure that public safety and social amenity.

Keeping Bees on Forested Lands – A Code of Practice provides guidelines to ensure that apiarists meet the demands of the managers of public forests.
Compatibility of management objectives on public lands and beekeeping

Migrating hives into New South Wales

Honey bees can only be moved into New South Wales from mainland States and Territories if they are accompanied by a Health Certificate signed by a relevant Apiary Inspector. Worker and drone bees can only be moved into New South Wales from Tasmania if they are escorting a queen bee, subject to other conditions.

No formal restrictions apply for moving hives within New South Wales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public land category</th>
<th>Land area (hectares)</th>
<th>Beekeeping permitted?</th>
<th>Additional conditions</th>
<th>Regulatory agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crown Land</td>
<td>34 million</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Activity will be conditional on the terms of the license or lease holder, reserve trust or Local Land Services office</td>
<td>NSW Department of Primary Industries, Crown Lands Division of NSW Trade and Investment Local Lands Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park Estate</td>
<td>5 million</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Existing apiary sites can continue to operate New/additional sites are prohibited Existing site can be relocated, subject to approval</td>
<td>National Parks and Wildlife Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Forest</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Beekeeping activity generally permitted Additional permits may or may not be permitted depending on forestry zone</td>
<td>Forestry Corporation of NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilderness Area</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Beekeeping not permitted Any existing apiary sites must be transferred</td>
<td>Office of Environment and Heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compatibility of management objectives on public lands and beekeeping

Conclusion

Public land is an important resource for NSW beekeepers, particularly during the crucial periods of hive build up prior to and post pollination. Whilst beekeepers derive a direct benefit from accessing this resource, pollination-reliant industries also derive substantial indirect benefits from such access.

The management objectives for public land in NSW are defined in the legislation under which the land tenure has been established and/or in specific plans of management. Public land is typically managed to meet a range of community, recreational, educational, commercial and conservation objectives.

The compatibility of beekeeping on public lands is largely determined by the anticipated impact that the activity will have on the other prescribed uses. In some cases, public land sought by beekeepers in NSW will be subject to few competing uses such as crown lands, which increases the chance of complying with management objectives. On public lands with a high conservation value such as national parks in NSW a more precautionary approach is evident with greater restrictions governing access by beekeepers, however on an individual reserve basis beekeeping may be considered an appropriate complementary use.

The willingness of public land managers in NSW to issue a license or otherwise negotiate access to those lands by beekeepers will be dependent on their ability to determine whether beekeeping activities will adversely impact the management objectives or other users on a site by site basis. The beekeeping industry and land managers may be able to develop a decision framework to help identify areas where risks associated with managed honey bees are likely to be minimal as well as those where the risks are likely to be more significant.

For more detailed information on the role of public land management objectives and beekeeping for NSW and other States and Territories refer to the project document, Compatibility of Management Objectives on Public Lands with Beekeeping and other Fact Sheets prepared by GHD for RIRDC (PRJ-009102)

Process for accessing public lands

In order to ensure access to public land in NSW, beekeepers must consider the following:

- Maintain a current level of registration with the Department of Primary Industries (renewed every two years).
- Engage in negotiations with the lessee when seeking access for Crown lands.
- Obtain a license (administered by the respective regulatory agency) for all other major public land tenures listed in the summary table. In the case of national parks, it should be noted that licenses will not be approved for additional sites.