

PROJECT SUMMARY



**RURAL
INDUSTRIES**

Research & Development
Corporation

Development of a Code of Practice and National Bee Biosecurity Program

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The issue

Ensuring the honey bee industry has the capacity to better manage established pests, and to have surveillance in place for early detection of exotic pests such as Varroa mite is critical to the future sustainability and viability of the Australian honey bee and pollination industry.

Unfortunately, established pests are causing ongoing and significant economic and social harm and an industry/government partnership needs to be put in place to limit the impact to individual beekeepers and the broader industry and economy.

Exotic pests such as Varroa mite, Tropilaelaps mite or Tracheal mite are also a constant threat. If an incursion occurred, the reduction in the number of hives and increased management costs for beekeepers would be very damaging to Australia.

Overseas experience suggests that if major established pests are not properly controlled when a pest such as Varroa mite arrives, the dual effect is worse. For these reasons, greater national coordination and industry leadership is urgently needed to manage established bee pests, as well as prepare for the possible establishment of any of these exotic pests.

The recently successful honey levy reform, with the new rates -from 1 July 2015, increases the honey bee industry's biosecurity investment and allows for an effective and coordinated national biosecurity strategy for the honey bee industry to be put in place from 2015.

The increase in industry funding will enable the delivery of two national biosecurity programs, one focusing on surveillance of exotic pests (National Bee Pest Surveillance Program) and the other to better manage established pests and prepare for exotic pests (Biosecurity Code of Practice and National Bee Biosecurity Program). This project summary relates to the latter and the work that has been completed over the last 2 years by Plant Health Australia (PHA), working with the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC).

These two programs will work together, not only fulfilling the honey bee industry's biosecurity vision but also helping to put in place a world-class biosecurity arrangement for the Australian honey bee industry. Both Programs will effectively create a government and industry biosecurity partnership to better manage established pests, and to better prepare and survey for exotic pests.



Honey bee industry biosecurity vision

To maintain a profitable and sustainable honey bee and pollination industry in Australia supported by an effective biosecurity system to help prevent exotic pest incursions, as well as improving the management of established pests





Outcomes

In an effort to improve the management of established pests and diseases, as well as increase the preparedness and surveillance of exotic pest threats in the honey bee industry, AHBIC and PHA have been working with the entire honey bee industry and state and federal governments to develop the Biosecurity Code of Practice and the National Bee Biosecurity Program from 2015/16.

The recently successful honey levy process secures the honey bee industry's contribution of \$400,000 per year to the proposed program.

The purpose of the National Bee Biosecurity Program is to promote best management practices for beekeepers in Australia through the establishment of a mandatory Biosecurity Code of Practice.

The Biosecurity Code of Practice is based on the principles of good biosecurity and aims to provide a clear framework for Australian beekeepers to engage in best-practice biosecurity. The objectives of the Code are to:

- Increase productivity in the Australian honey bee industry by improving the general level of pest and disease control by Australian beekeepers.
- Assist beekeepers in recognising established and exotic pests and diseases and help in preparation for an exotic or emerging disease response.
- Assist in the management of significant established diseases of bees

- Ensure beekeepers maintain vigilance for the presence of exotic pests and diseases.
- To ensure the future viability and sustainability of the Australian honey bee industry.

To ensure that Australian commercial beekeepers are following appropriate biosecurity practices, the Program would employ a specific Bee Biosecurity Officer in all six states. It is proposed that this position would be within each State DPI, and would be funded through a combination of beekeeper levies and state government contributions.

The role of the Bee Biosecurity Officer is to provide extension services for industry, as well as training, education and to monitor industry's compliance with the Code. The work plans and milestones of the Bee Biosecurity Officer would be determined in consultation between industry and relevant State DPI's.

The standards expected in the Code and Program are not onerous; they are only things that all beekeepers should be doing anyway to manage and / or minimise the impact of pests and diseases on their hives.

In the event of an incursion of an exotic pest, such as Varroa mite, the Bee Biosecurity Officer would be on hand to provide expert support to industry, help with the design and implementation of response measures and also help provide training and education for beekeepers.



Implications

The Code and Program have been developed to incorporate fundamental biosecurity principles into the practices of all Australian beekeepers. Although outlined in further detail in the Code, the overarching principles of good beekeeping biosecurity are training and planning, reducing exposure to pests and diseases, controlling the potential spread of undetected disease, training and education, observing for signs of established and exotic pests and diseases, controlling pests and diseases, keeping accurate records and hive and equipment maintenance.

The Code and Program will have industry in the driving seat, able to be involved in the development of work plans and milestone for the Program in their state.

If all beekeepers comply with the Code and it has both industry and government support, state specific regulations and legislation, such as registration systems, interstate health certificates and notifiable pest lists could also be streamlined to a national consistent level. This would save both time and money for industry and governments.

Overseas experience suggests that if established pests and diseases are under control and beekeepers are well educated, then the impact of an exotic pest such as Varroa mite, is reduced.

Next steps

PHA, AHBIC, state beekeeping associations as well as governments will be working towards implementing the Code and Program in every state in Australia. This will involve hiring 'new' Bee Biosecurity Officers in some states, while in other states, it will result in more of an apiary focus with existing staff through the provision of additional industry funding.

Updates on the implementation of the Code and Program will be regularly provided to industry journals and newsletters, as well as at industry meetings and conferences.



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