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Hon Leon Bignell MP
Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
GPO Box 464
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Dear Minister Bignell

The South Australian apiary industry comprises over 12% of the nation's hives and 9% of the apiarists, but we produce around 20% of the nation's honey. This equates to around 65,000 hives owned by approximately 1,070 apiarists. While honey production contributes about \$8M to the SA economy, the value of pollination services by managed honeybees is much larger and has been estimated at \$550M for the state.

The greatest contribution honeybees make to the Australian economy however is as pollinators. Approximately 65% of Australia's horticultural and agricultural crops require pollination, with some crops either totally dependent on honeybee pollination, (eg. almonds), or benefiting from honeybee pollination (eg. an increase of 20% in canola yield).

There are a number of pests and diseases of bees already present in South Australia. These *endemic* pests and diseases have the potential to significantly impact on bee productivity and therefore, industry profitability. Most notably, American Foul Brood (AFB) is present throughout the state and requires continual vigilant management to minimise its impact on production. Another disease that may also have significant impact on individual enterprises is European Foul Brood (EFB). There is also Small Hive Beetle (SHB), which although not currently endemic, has been previously found in South Australia and is present in the Eastern States.

Historically, the South Australian state government has resourced an endemic disease control program with a major focus on AFB management. However, our government is now focusing on exotic pest and disease risk mitigation rather than endemic disease control. As a result, the role of the current apiary inspector has been realigned to focus on exotic bee pest and diseases and other priority biosecurity activities.

Whilst the industry is prepared to 'self-manage' endemic disease control, AFB presents a unique and difficult management issue. The disease infects the brood (hatching eggs) killing newly formed bees in the nest, eventually weakening the hive to the point of death. There is no cure for the disease and the only control available is to burn infected equipment and bees or sterilise the equipment.

The disease is spread by stronger hives 'robbing' (stealing the honey from the weaker hive) and transporting the honey with the spores back to their hive in turn infecting the stronger hive. Stronger hives can forage and 'rob' for up to a 3km radius. It is this reason the disease is often said to penalise the good beekeepers with strong hives, as their hives may be clean but can be easily exposed to the disease. Particularly during pollination period, such as almonds and lucerne, where thousands of hives are located within kilometres of each other, heightening the risk of the disease infecting unsuspecting enterprises.

Education programs are undertaken by growers groups, such as the almond board of Australia, to educate growers and encourage hive audits at pollination. However this alone is insufficient. The only effective method of keeping this disease in check is to inspect suspect hives.

The traditional inspection and compliance program conducted by the PIRSA apiary officer has been effective in containing outbreaks and enforcing compliance. Since this program ceased in 2011 there has been no regular inspection conducted until August this year. During the most recent inspections a significant outbreak was detected during almond pollination exposing thousands of hives to potential infection and risking many enterprises.

SA is currently the only state committing industry funds for AFB inspections, demonstrating our industry leadership in an attempt of self-management, as other state DPI's are continuing to fund inspections. Our industry is prepared to manage endemic diseases in a sustainable way through implementing an industry funded and managed Code of Practice (CoP). The South Australian Apiary Industry Advisory Group (SAAIAG) has spent many hours developing the CoP which has now become the template for a national CoP. SA already has the highest level of industry quality assurance participation nationally, but we need to encourage the poor producers to improve. Whilst every effort is being made to implement the national code as soon as possible at this stage it appears the earliest we can expect its implementation is the end of 2015.

The issue we face is that in order to implement an effect monitoring/inspection service we must be able to inspect hives to ensure they are compliant with the livestock act and are AFB free. However, we are informed by PIRSA that the only way this is possible is for a PIRSA officer to inspect the hives. The issue is that because PIRSA will no longer offer this service we must fully cost recover from industry. Industry does have a voluntary fund, at \$1/hive, and collects around \$40K per annum. This generates approximately \$40K annual income.

As an industry we have funded the first round of a disease control program which has been very success in identifying and eradicating some 400 infected hives which were identified during the concentration of hives at almond pollination. This initial program ran for 20 days at a cost of \$20K in August this year. The program identified another significant outbreak of AFB which needs to be dealt with. The

second program that industry is funding and is about to commence will operate for total of 51 days for a cost of \$47K. As you can see this is not sustainable for our industry to manage endemic disease into the future at these cost levels.

Recommendations:

1. We as an industry need to have inspectors on the ground inspecting hives to reduce and maintain AFB at low levels. We see two viable and sustainable options to achieve this:
 - PIRSA to empower private individual/s to carry out the inspection service in a financially more sustainable manner. I believe that this individual would need to be gazetted to give them the required powers to inspect hives, which has been done in the past.
 - PIRSA to subsidise the cost of funding an inspection program using PIRSA staff.
2. Cost Recovery of compliance
 - Currently we as an industry are paying for the full cost of cleaning up breaches of the livestock act. We propose that the cost of compliance is recovered from the individual in breach
3. PIRSA to manage Code of practice compliance at registration
4. Make the voluntary levy mandatory
 - This would generate a significantly more income into the fund to help industry manage endemic disease with an additional \$25K into the fund annually.
5. Adopt more of the recommendation of the Glanville Report ie. Increase in Apiary unit inspectors.

In Summary

We are aware that the government wishes to contain the costs incurred from having groups such as the AIAG in place. We believe that we can effectively manage the industry fund and provide industry communication to government with having one official meeting per annum (currently 3-4 meetings), dramatically reducing the costs. The group would approve a management committee which would voluntarily meet from time to time to manage any projects and implement the industry CoP. An annual budget would be developed for the Minister. The fund would of course be audited, as would each project. An annual Report would also be prepared for the Minister and industry. This would provide the government with an avenue to industry whilst allowing industry to transition to self-management of endemic diseases.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the above to ensure a bright future for our industry.

Yours sincerely



Danny Le Feuvre
Acting Chair,
South Australian Apiary Industry Advisory Group

