



AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

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Rebuilding the bushfire-devastated honey bee and pollination industry: Crucial to meet agriculture's \$100 billion target and put food on Aussie plates

During the 2019-20 bushfire crisis an estimated 15.6 million hectares of Australian native forest was destroyed. This has severely compromised the industry's \$14.2 billion per year¹ contribution to the Australian economy, from vital pollination services, and its role in delivering the National Farmers' Federations \$100 billion target by 2030. To secure the industry's future and the food on our plates, the industry has developed an industry wide [recovery action plan](#) to guide the industry as it rebuilds.

Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) and AgriFutures Australia, have examined the impact of the 2019-20 bushfires on local beekeepers and the pollination industry developing a six-point action plan providing a roadmap to rebuild the industry and its contribution to Australian agriculture.

According to AHBIC if the honey bee industry fails to recover from the bushfire crisis there simply won't be enough healthy honey bees to provide pollination services for Australian food production, a vital part of our agriculture sector and the sectors' \$100 billion target in farm gate value.

"The environmental loss from the bushfires puts at risk \$147 million worth of honey and hive products in Australia². This is on top of the loss to other agricultural industries from decreased pollination and the agricultural sectors contribution to the Australian economy. The risk to the industry, sector and Australian food security cannot be overstated," said AHBIC Chair, Trevor Weatherhead.

In order to produce profitable and sustainable honey and provide pollination services, honey bees need access to the floral diversity found in healthy forests.

He added the six point plans provides a roadmap for short-term support measures and longer-term industry changes that will make recovery possible. Its overall focus is on industry self-help and self-reliance once an initial recovery phase has been delivered.

¹ Karasinski JM (2018) The economic valuation of Australian managed and wild honey bee pollinators in 2014-15

² Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (2020) Honey GVP

“This requires an industry wide and coordinated approach, bringing together state industry bodies, private enterprise, State Governments, the Australian Government and professional beekeepers. For the industry’s success action ranges from immediate sugar and pollen subsidies, access to public lands even if only for the short term and industry outreach and engagement programs.”

“It also highlights the support and coordination required from the Australian Government to compensate for a decrease in R&D levies and ensure continued research, development and extension for the sustainability and profitability of the industry,” said Mr Weatherhead.

“In the short-term beekeepers should ensure they are managing the nutrition of honey bee colonies. It’s absolutely critical that colonies have access to supplementary feed sources as necessary,” said Mr Weatherhead.

The six point plan is underpinned by the report [*Bushfire Recovery Plan: Understanding what needs to be done to ensure the honey bee and pollination industry recovers from the 2019-20 bushfire crisis.*](#) Through industry-wide consultation, including a series of interviews with beekeepers and supply chain partners, author Michael Clarke, Principal, AgEconPlus calculated the effect of the bushfires on the industry and identified key themes to recover the beekeeping industry over the next five years: immediate recovery; future industry viability; hive husbandry and health RD&E; forest management and beekeeper access and improved floral resource diversity.

“The honey bee industry relies on income from honey levies for biosecurity and research. It’s not a wealthy or well-resourced industry. With honey production estimated to be down more than 50 per cent this year on its long-term average, if a significant biosecurity incident were to occur under these circumstances, the honey bee industry would not have the capacity struggle to respond.”

“The one thing we heard again and again in conducting this research is that while the cost is great during this current pollination season, it will be even greater next year when beekeepers’ financial and human reserves are exhausted particularly as the prospects for favourable conditions are not there due to the drought in many areas.”

For a copy of the report, plan and information on supplementary feeding visit agrifutures.com.au/honey-bee-pollination

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The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council aims to ensure the long-term economic viability, security and prosperity of the Australian Honey Bee industry in Australia.

Healthy Bees = Healthy People