Australian Honey Bee INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Newsletter

Newsletter Edition - October 2023

CEO Update October 2023

CEO report

It has been a couple of months since the last AHBIC newsletter. The call to transition the varroa response to management has meant that we have been, once again, swamped with meetings, negotiations and reviewing documents.

The decision to transition to management is incredibly disappointing for everyone in our industry but for many reasons it was no longer feasible to eradicate. It was always an ambitious task and everyone worked incredibly hard to try and achieve it.

Despite the last couple of months being all about Varroa we have been able to achieve other things in AHBIC.

Red Dwarf Honey Bee incursion in WA

The first Red Dwarf Honey Bee (RDHB) detection was in March 2023 at Dampier in Western Australia. There has been a total of 12 nests discovered to date. *Euvarroa sinhai* has been detected on many of the RDHB's but has not been found on European honey bees yet. *Euvarroa* is a relative of *Varroa destructor* which is the species found at Newcastle. It is unclear if this species of varroa can survive and reproduce on European honey bees with mixed reports in peer reviewed papers. Continual surveillance by DPIRD and DAFF is being conducted to delimit the incursion and monitor European honey bees in the area.

BBO immersion tour of NZ

AHBIC was successful in applying for funding from AgriFutures capacity building program to sponsor all of our national Bee Biosecurity Officers to head over to New Zealand. The trip allowed the BBO's to immerse themselves in all thing Varroa management.

We are very grateful to AgriFutures for supporting the trip and we have been seeing the information gained by the BBO's starting to be disseminated to industry.

Imported Honey Fighting Fund

The fund has been receiving good support from beekeepers with a pool of money to start the testing of honey. The subcommittee will meet to decide on the specific testing protocols that will be used to ensure we can make the money stretch as far as possible without

compromising the data. We have been gathering honey from shelves across the country ready for testing.

We have been working with DAFF to improve testing protocols but also discussing the potential for DWV to enter Australia through imported honey. There is some scientific work being conducted to determine if DWV can remain viable in honey.

Standards Australia and the International Standards Organisation

As previously discussed AHBIC has initiated the Australian membership of the international committee for honey standards. The Australian committee has met several times and worked through the international documents. Good progress in being made and when the committee is comfortable with final draft we will share the documents with wider industry for consultation.

AHBIC thanks Liz Barbour who travelled to international standards committee meeting in Turkey earlier this year. The information on the workings of the committee has been valuable in informing our feedback.

NAPCaRN

I attended the Northern Australia People Capacity and Responsiveness Network in Cairns earlier this month. This was a valuable roundtable that allowed me to put honey bees front and centre for biosecurity activities in the north. Despite now having Varroa we still don't have Tropilaelaps mites which is endemic in the islands to our north. Ensuring honey bees are at the fore front of the biosecurity officers minds when designing surveillance activities is important for our industry.

Bee Deaths on Almonds

AHBIC has been worked with the Almond Board of Australia and produced a quick response form to capture the contact information of beekeepers that are impacted by bee deaths on almonds. Unfortunately, there has been reports of deaths this year which appears to be isolated to one orchard. We are working with the ABA to understand the cause of these deaths with samples being collected and sent to labs for testing.

Sugar 4 Bees

AHBIC in partnership with Sugar Australia has distributed just under 100t of sugar dust to beekeepers across the Varroa management zones. We thank Sugar Australia for their support in donating the dust to help desperate beekeepers. Unfortunately, our original agreement was for the supply of 100t which we have distributed but we continue to negotiate with Sugar Australia for further support.

Communications

AHBIC hosted our 4th Varroa webinar which had nearly 1,000 register and 500 attendees. We have produced regular Varroa updates that are posted on our website and have been regularly reviewing communications documents for many in the industry.

AHBIC Industry Webinar 4 – Transition to Management

Varroa Response

Once again, we have been consumed by the workload created after the decision to transition. We have been attending many meetings, several workshops in Canberra

with the CCEPP group, and contributing the transition plan for industry. We have been meeting regularly with the AHBIC executive and NSWAA executive throughout the process.

Both Bianca and I have been participating as ILO's in the Victorian response with daily IMT briefings and in the NSW response with two IMT briefings weekly. AHBIC will also be contributing to the SA Varroa Advisory Group that will meet monthly.

The Month Ahead

Meetings and discussion around the varroa response will continue this month and hopefully the transition draft plan will be completed by NSW DPI. Plant Health Australia have their AGM and members meeting in Canberra at the end of the month and the National Bee Biosecurity Steering Committee meeting mid-month. AHBIC in conjunction with CropLife Australia will be re-launching the updated Bee-Connected app on the 16th Nov in Canberra with the Federal Minister of Agriculture. The honey standards committee will continue to meet regularly and the many AHBIC subcommittees have meetings scheduled over the coming month.

Chair Report – October 2023

Acting Chair – Jon Lockwood

The National Management Group (NMG) confirmed at its meeting on 19 September 2023 that eradication of Varroa destructor is no longer feasible based on technical grounds, following advice from the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP), and has now embarked on Response Plan Version 4 draft to include a transition to management phase.

AHBIC would like to acknowledge the sacrifices that beekeepers have made in the eradication effort. Whether you lost hives, were subject to a surveillance zone, lost sales on nucleus hives or queens or lost honey production and pollination income due to boarder or zone restrictions, the eradication process seemed at times, unkind. At the least, the effort to eradicate even if unsuccessful, allowed the spread to be slowed, buying critical time to prepare and we can tell future generations we gave it our best.

Looking forward

Reality has set in, it is predicted Varroa will be present across New South Wales, and eventually into Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia within the next three years. Westen Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory may have several more years due to natural isolation. Managing Varroa will not be easy by any means. Treatment costs, additional labour, sacrificing honey flows to treat and additional winter losses will all add to the beekeeping business bottom line.

No doubt a lot of beekeepers will need to make some serious decisions, such as “am I going to stay in beekeeping and manage varroa or is it best to move on?” Perhaps reducing numbers is best for your individual circumstances. After the initial Varroa wave moves through the landscape there will be opportunity for some to prosper. The reduction of feral colonies may over time increase managed honey production and may open new opportunities for pollination services. Every other country in the world can manage Varroa, so can Australia.

Transition to management

AHBIC are actively involved in negotiating the best possible package for the beekeeping industry and are highlighting the need for a National role out of Transition to Management activities. Education and training are among the priority, to give beekeepers knowledge to begin to handle Varroa. In the meantime, educating yourself is advantageous but we must be cautious as a lot of advice may not be appropriate in an Australian context.

AHBIC continue to lobby for acaricides for treatment to be readily available.

AHBIC strongly believe there will not be any issues with availability of treatments, there is no need to panic. All beekeepers must be doing washes (good beekeepers will be) to monitor for mites, if varroa is detected it **must** be reported to your jurisdiction. Call the Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881 to help monitor the spread. It is important to note that if Varroa is detected it may not be necessary to treat until it has met the economical threshold to treat.

Industry resilience

There is no doubt there are rough times ahead. The beekeeping community must gather around each other and stick together. Beekeeping can be quite lonely; it is important to refer to your support networks. Talk to each other, attend local branch meetings, don’t be afraid to ask for help. Perhaps you can remember when other pests or diseases, even COVID came upon us, it was very daunting at the time but now is the normal.

In a few years’ time Varroa will be the new way of life, beekeepers will prevail.

Jon Lockwood

AHBIC 2023
NEW ZEALAND

AHBIC New Zealand Immersion Tour – Sponsored by AgriFutures

Bee Biosecurity Officers across Australia play a highly regarded and critically important role to honey bee industry.

AHBIC believes their outreach through education and guidance to beekeepers will continue to be in demand as the National Varroa Response has reached Transition to Management phase.

The aim of the New Zealand tour was to build knowledge and experience of our BBO's and provide an opportunity to strengthen capacity in the Australian honey bee industry.

Image 1: Visit and meetings at Ministry for Primary Industries New Zealand head office, from left to right; Richard Hall PhD (Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand), Rod Bourke (NSW DPI Bee Biosecurity Officer), James Sheehan (DPIRD WA Project Officer – Bees), Adam Maxwell (AgVIC – Leading Biosecurity Officer Apiary), Bianca Giggins (AHBIC Varroa Coordinator), Hayley Pragert (Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand) and Dr Jessica Bikaun (DPIRD WA Project Officer Bees).

Attendees

Our travel team included apiary biosecurity experts:

- Rod Bourke (Bee Biosecurity Officer, New South Wales Department of Primary Industries)
- James Sheehan(Project Officer – Bees Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development)
- Adam Maxwell (Leading Biosecurity Officer Apiary at the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)
- Dr Jessica Bikaun (Project Officer – Bees Plant Biosecurity Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development)

Tour Objectives

- Observe and discuss beekeeping practices with biosecurity authorities and apiary industry leaders
- Workshop practical field based recognition and detection of *Varroa destructor* amongst staff using techniques routinely used as well as novel/emerging capabilities by beekeepers
- Observation and work experience with experienced commercial and

recreational beekeepers to discuss their long-term experiences managing Varroa
- Examine communication strategies and learnings from the Transition to Management phase of Varroa establishment in New Zealand, and avenues currently used for promoting best practice Varroa management

Tour Details

Over the course of eight day tour our cohort of BBOs spoke with government agencies, key industry representatives and beekeepers with a variety of production scales. We were able to visit hives around Wellington, Lake Taupo, Palmerston North, Taihape, Hamiton and Auckland and were delighted to learn that growers not only continued production after their initial outbreak 20 years ago, but there have been many newcomers to the industry since. We were really surprised at the different behaviours of beekeepers, in terms of variety of production techniques and honey markets. New Zealand Apiarists we visited are equally varied in their treatment of Varroa and the methodology behind why they chose a certain treatment at a certain time.

Situation

- In the beginning, beekeepers we met with gained immensely from workshops, training days and engagement with their Apiary staff
- Apiary staff and beekeepers forged strong relationships and ongoing education and support was achieved for some years post transition

- Beekeepers are acutely affected by the ongoing costs of management and chemical treatment to control Varroa in their colonies
- Chemical treatments we saw utilised were, oxalic acid fogging, apivar strips, Bayvarol strips, Thymol pads, formic acid
- Systematic monitoring before treatment and after treatment was being done at varying rates and mostly by corflute trays with oil placed inside the bottom of boxes, not so much by alcohol washing, thought to be a due to the duration Varroa has been in New Zealand (20years).

What's different about New Zealand

What we learnt about treatments

- Monitoring is a critical learning piece which becomes the main tool to empower decision making
- Product efficacy is always IMPORTANT
- Lower percentage of efficacy means repeating the treatment at a faster rate to the colony by the beekeeper = increased cost
- Treatments varied between apiary and beekeeper so were often determined by cost, monitoring result, time of year and time available, residue risk management

Australian Considerations after the Immersion Tour

You can read and listen to more about the AgriFutures Capacity Building opportunity by visiting the article **Learning how to live with Varroa | AgriFutures Australia** and listening to Bianca's AgriFutures OnAir Podcast episode **AgriFutures On Air: Learning from our neighbours: how NZ lives with varroa on Apple Podcasts**

AHBIC Industry Update 48 – 478 days of response

Varroa Treatment Availability

The NSW DPI has created an emergency use permit (PER94055) for Formic Pro, Bayvarol and Apistan that has approved suppliers identified on the permit. This means that those listed on the permit are able to import and sell the listed Varroa treatments to beekeepers in NSW. Under the same permit NSW beekeepers are legally allowed to apply those treatments to their hives as per the label conditions.

Apivar has full Australian registration, but it will take time for the manufacturer to produce product with the Australian label. In the interim NSW DPI has applied for an emergency use permit to allow NZ labelled Apivar to be sold through the listed suppliers. This should be approved in the coming weeks providing beekeepers access to the two most commonly used synthetic miticides.

Varroa Treatment registrations

AHBIC and NSW DPI have been working with the APVMA and chemical companies to progress full registration of as many treatment options as possible for Australian beekeepers. This is an extremely slow process and requires significant investment from the manufactures to achieve full Australian registration.

An application for Bayvarol registration has been submitted and awaiting APVMA assessment. The NSW DPI has prepared an application for Oxalic acid (Api-Bioxal) for dribbling and fogging after lobbying from AHBIC to the APVMA to consider registration. This will be submitted soon for assessment but under current permits/registration Oxalic Acid is not permitted for use. Availability of some approved products may be limited until product arrives on shore.

Hive Treatments

Experiences in the NSW Central Coast area have demonstrated that Varroa mite build up can be slow. Low mite numbers detected in July 2022 to high mite numbers detected in the feral colonies in October 2023 demonstrates that Varroa built up slowly in this region. It has taken over 15 months to go from low mite numbers in the area to numbers that are causing colony collapse in the feral hives.

Applying this observation to the greater NSW Suppression (GREEN) Zone we would expect that beekeepers may not need to be extensively treating for mites for many months. Buying enough time to roll out the activities of the transition to management, including training and establishment of the commercial supply of miticides.

Further observations have seen clean hives that have been introduced into the NSW Central Coast region be infested with mites at a rate of around 100 mites/week. This is in line with international experiences in the initial phase of spread highlighting that reinfestation will be an ongoing issue as both feral and managed, untreated colonies collapse. The only method to

ensure hive health, will be continued hive monitoring for mite numbers and control once mites reach treatment threshold numbers.

The table below reflects the progress to date of APVMA permits/registrations and treatment products.

Always read the label and if the label differs to the permit conditions then follow the permit. This information is specifically relevant to NSW as Varroa has not been identified in any other jurisdiction at time of print.

**Ensure you read the label and adhere to the Personal Protective Equipment requirements and miticide storage requirements of each product.*

***Despite being registered/permit, product availability will vary*.

Table 1. Varroa treatment options, Australia – October 2023 NSW and ACT only

Monitor hives & Report results

Based on technical expert advice provided to AHBIC beekeepers can follow some basic treatment principles to get through the initial wave of spread. This information includes discussions regarding Varroa treatment, which are only currently permitted within NSW as no Varroa detections have occurred in other states and territories.

Synthetic Approach

- Monitor hives regularly using alcohol wash, soapy water or sugar shake to determine mite loadings. Check out **the Bee pest Blitz** for detailed alcohol wash information and remember to report to your jurisdiction as required.
- If monitoring shows mite levels are at treatment threshold (Table 2) then a control method must be applied.
- If hives are on a honey flow then apply Bayvarol strips as per label/permit. If hives are not on a honey flow and supers can be removed use Apivar strips. Leave strips in for 6-8 weeks and remove.
- Repeat monitoring within 5 weeks post treatment. If mites are found at threshold levels in a wash then repeat the above treatment. If thresholds are met within 5 weeks it is likely there are high mite loadings in the local feral or managed colonies.

Organic Approach

- Monitor hives regularly using alcohol wash, soapy water or sugar shake to determine mite loadings. Check out **the Bee pest Blitz** for detailed alcohol wash information and remember to report to your jurisdiction as required.
- If monitoring shows mite levels are at treatment threshold (Table 2) then a control method must be applied.
- Use either Apiguard or Formic pro for either 6 weeks (Apiguard) or 7 days (Formic Pro) and remove.
- It is critical that mite monitoring occurs as soon as practicable to determine

efficacy of treatment. If mite counts are low then continue with regular monitoring until mites reach threshold and then repeat treatment.

*Organic treatments are an option for beekeepers but are less reliable and provide a shorter window of protection against re-infestation, require a higher level of monitoring, and have temperature limitations.

Table 2. Treatment thresholds depending on colony phase/season and # of Varroa found per hive in an alcohol wash, soapy water wash, or sugar shake (adapted from **NSW DPI Factsheet: Varroa mite management options for NSW.**)

NSW Hive Euthanasia

If you have hives in a former NSW RED zone which have not yet been euthanised and you would like to opt-in to have your hives euthanised by NSW DPI and apply to receive ORC, please contact NSW DPI on

1800 084 881 prior to 25 October 2023, and formalise the process with the NSW DPI staff.

Requests to opt-in to voluntary hive euthanasia received after 25 October may not receive ORC.

The ORC program will not be extended into 2024.

Beekeepers who opt to retain their hives and treat with miticide strips are ineligible to claim ORCs.

AHBIC Industry Briefing Webinar

Varroa mite Emergency Response – Transition to Management Industry Update.

Register here:

https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/varroa mite-emergency-response-transition-to-management-industry-update-tickets-736936385567?aff=oddtdtcreator

When: Thursday 19 October, 7pm – 8:00pm EST

Where: Zoom event – link will be provided following registration

AHBIC will provide an update on the developing approach for the transition to management of Varroa mite. The webinar will be hosted by AHBIC with presentations from AHBIC CEO Danny Le Feurve, key members of the response team from the NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) and a presentation from Agriculture Victoria.

This is a free event open to interested members of the honeybee industry and wider community across Australia. Please register for the briefing.

AHBIC, its employees, executive and consultants expressly disclaim all and any liability to any person in respect of anything, and the consequences of anything, done or omitted to be done in reliance, whether wholly, partly, upon the whole or any part of the contents of this industry update document.

You can reach out to AHBIC via:

Varroa Coordinator

Bianca Giggins

bianca@honeybee.org.au

0402 467 780

Farm Business Resilience Programs Across Australia

Beekeeper Business' Did You Know….

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to give farmers (including Beekeepers) the tools to manage the complex farm business risks faced by your enterprise.

Farm Business Resilience Program

Through this program farmers including farm managers and employees will have access to subsidised learning and development opportunities in strategic business management, farm risk management and decision-making, natural resource management, and personal and social resilience.

Learning and development

This program will provide practical help to farmers to:

- upskill their strategic farm business management and planning approaches to best practice industry standards
- use data to understand their farm business's strategic risks and improve decision making processes
- learn about innovation and diversification options, new farming practices, systems and markets
- think about succession planning and learn new ways to manage people and time.

The Program will also offer farmers:

- an assessment of their business's performance, to identify opportunities to build resilience and help track progress
- support to develop or update farm business plans, tailored to their farms
- access to one-on-one professional advice on their plan
- practical tools and resources to take back to the farm.

Delivery

Each state and territory run these programs to reach farm business right across Australia – delivered through each state and territory. You can find out what's happening in each state or territory as information becomes available by selecting below:

QUEENSLAND

NEW SOUTH WALES

VICTORIA

TASMANIA

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NORTHERN TERRITORY

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Friends of AHBIC

If you aren't already a Friend of AHBIC, we welcome you to join our group of organisations and individuals who are supporting Australia's national beekeeping industry that supports you.

Imported Honey Fighting Fund has Launched!

Visit AHBIC's Imported Honey Fighting Fund Page to Donate Now!

B-QUAL

How does B-QUAL certification benefit my business?

- Product integrity
- Quality Assurance
- HACCP based certification
- Regulatory compliance
- Industry best practice
- Biosecurity
- Access to domestic and export markets

B-QUAL Certification also enables an enterprise to market its product under the B-QUAL logo to show that it meets the B-QUAL Industry Standards.

Complete your training at home at your own pace.

For more information and to obtain a Certification Information Pack, contact the B-QUAL Certification team.

www.bqual.com.au
B-QUAL Pty Ltd
Phone 0404 381 942
Email: **admin@bqual.com.au**

B-Trace

The specially designed app will assist in maintaining hive record information that satisfies the requirements of the National Biosecurity Code of Practice. The program is intended for small commercial and recreational beekeepers who sell honeybee products direct to:

- Famers Markets
- Direct to consumers
- Food stalls
- Boutique shops, such as Bakeries, Fruit and Vegetable, Delicatessens, Restaurants and similar

The low annual fee includes the use of the hive management app and an annual desk audit.

For further information go to **www.btrace.com.au**