



15 August 2022

QBA Members Update

National Varroa Update:

At the time of writing Sunday 14th August there are 97 confirmed Infested Premises. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of infested premises reported in the last two weeks, all cases remained link or are geographically expected. The eradication zone has not grown at the same rate as the new IP's and has only grown slightly on the western edges of the Newcastle Zone. The Eradication covers over 5000km². Surveillance continues to be a priority at the Narrabri and Coffs Harbour Zones and to date there has been no other mites found other than the original IP's, this is encouraging. Surveillance has now been conducted on 24,971 hives.

As for the destruction of hives there have been some challenges, subsequently there have been some changes to the prescribed plan. These changes have related to retaining boxes and dealing with poly hives. There is now a process where hives are being euthanised and sealed for a period, the bees and frames are then disposed of, and the boxes are retained. To date 5,279 hives have been euthanised.

The Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests or CCEPP meeting was held Tuesday 2 August 2022. There was agreement at the meeting that varroa mite in New South Wales (NSW) is still technically feasible to eradicate. However, there were concerns expressed over how NSW is going to manage feral beehives. Currently, the priority of the NSW DPI is the eradication of hives in the red zones. NSW DPI have been asked to come back with a strategy for the management of feral bee populations.

In addition, forward command posts or FCP's are now located at Narrabri, Coffs Harbour, Balranald, and Griffith. The Narrabri and Coffs Harbour forward command centres are focused on surveillance and ensuring any mites that are in those zones are found. The FCP's at Griffith and Balranald are focused on conducting surveillance in almond pollination. This surveillance will be done with miticide stripes and sticky mats, which has been identified to be the most sensitive method of surveillance at our disposal. The NSW DPI expects around 47,000 hives to attend almond pollination in NSW and intensive surveillance would help confirm that the outbreak is contained.

There has been some confusion and misinformation surrounding protocols to save high value genetics from the eradication zones. Up until last week Tocal Collage, the home of the Plan B Breeding stock was not in an eradication zone. A protocol has been in the works for several weeks and is soon to be finalised. This protocol will see queen bees individually inspected under a microscope to clear them of varroa before being relocated out of the zone. This will be offered to all commercial queen bee breeders in the zones to save as much high value genetic stock from eradication as possible.

The process to reimburse beekeepers that have had hives destroyed in the zones is nearly finalised. The Owner Reimbursement Costs or ORC's are an already agreed upon mechanism to compensate commercial beekeepers for their losses in a biosecurity response. The details of the ORC's are available on the Plant Health Australia website. As for the amateur beekeepers effected, there has already been an announcement of the compensation that they will be offered.

To date there has been no tracheal mites found in conjunction with this detection of varroa. Deformed Wing Virus has not been detected; however, work is continuing across many laboratories to investigate the mites for any presence of exotic diseases. The genomic sequencing of the mite has uncovered that the mite is of the Korean Haploid type which is the most common strain of varroa around the World, work also continues as scientific experts endeavour to identify the origin of the mite.

As the weeks pass there has been great speculation around the point of ground zero in NSW. It is looking likely that the mites did not enter through the Newcastle Port as there has been a cluster of IP's develop around the Newcastle Airport, RAAF Airbase and surrounding Industrial precinct. We may never know the point of entry into Australia, but rest assured there are investigations underway.

The QBA continue to participate in 3 AHBIC briefings per week. AHBIC maintains an Industry Liaison Officer or ILO position in the State Control Centre at Orange. The role of the ILO is to provide updates to industry and feedback to the NSW DPI. We are thankful for the open line of communication that AHBIC has provided to keep us informed on the situation. Amateur Beekeepers Australia, The New South Wales Apiarist Association and various pollination dependent Industries also maintain ILO's in the Local and State Control centres.

On the 29th of July 2022, the Senate launched a Federal Inquiry into the 'Adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot-and-mouth disease and varroa mite. The inquiry is now accepting submissions with the closing date for submissions being the 26th August 2022. The QBA will be making a submission and would encourage any members to do the same.

QLD Varroa Update:

The Queensland Government stood up a full State Control Centre shortly after the detection of varroa in Newcastle to work through various challenges. The QBA continues to meet with the State Control Centre 3 times per week for updates on the situation. This has been a valuable line of communication; we have continued to express our concerns and the concerns of our members and will continue to advocate to protect beekeeping in Queensland.

There has been a change to the Movement Control Order last week to ensure that bees returning from almond pollination are re-entering with a permit. This is to allow a level of traceability of the hives movements. Permit conditions have not yet been released but we are confident that the conditions will be in the interest of protecting the Queensland Beekeeping Industry. Permits will likely be cross referenced with other jurisdictions to ensure information is accurate. The position of the Queensland Government remains that bees will be allowed to re-enter QLD from almond pollination in Victoria. It is hoped that permit conditions will be released shortly.

We would like to reiterate that decisions made by government are made on a risk basis. The Queensland Government has done, and continues to review risk assessments. These risk assessments are based on advice of epidemiologists, statisticians, and other experts to ensure the safety of the Queensland Beekeeping Industry.

To date there have been 2 traces of bees of bees from emergency zones into Queensland. One case was of Queen bees, and the other were hives that where in Queensland before Christmas. Both cases were considered very low risk. Both traces were investigated by Biosecurity Queensland and have now been closed off. Alcohol washes were conducted on bees involved and surrounding both cases.

As you are aware the Queensland Government has Launched the BEE 123 reporting tool. This tool has been very useful in collecting data from around the state. As of the 1st of August 2022, a total of 1,196 hives have

been checked for varroa out of 5,497 hives that have been reported to the BEE 123. Whilst this does give some confidence that Queensland is varroa free, we need to continue to conduct and report our surveillance activities. I encourage everyone to be doing surveillance particularly if you are considering in participating in an intensive pollination event, at the very least 10% of hives should be checked and those checks should be reported to BEE 123.

Finally, thanks to those who have volunteered to participate in the response efforts. Many of the Queensland based volunteers have spent a week or more in the hot zones conducting surveillance. On behalf of the QBA Executive team we'd like to extend our sincere thanks, your effort and contribution to the industry's welfare is greatly appreciated.

If you are able and willing to participate in the response, please keep an eye out for the AHBIC online volunteer form and complete it to register your interest. The form has now been extended to include dates into the middle of September.

The QBA's position remains that we believe that this incursion is technically feasible to eradicate, we continue to communicate this position to government and AHBIC.

QBA Business Update:

The EKKA is now over for another year. By all reports it was a very successful return after a few years off. A huge thanks to our volunteer team with special mention to Adrian Jones, Marion Weatherhead, and Ray Goldsworthy for their coordination and organisation of the Honey Court.

The Nature Conservation Amendment Bill to grant a 20-year extension for beekeeping in National Parks was set to be debated on the floor of parliament this week. It is our understanding that it may not be debated during this sitting week. We will provide further updates on this matter as they come to hand.

Finally, in the first two weeks of the varroa response, the Queensland Government approached the QBA and made an offer to provide the QBA with a financial grant to assist the association with administrative support. The government recognised that the Management team is made up of members who volunteer their time to executive roles with Jo Martin (QBA State Secretary) being the sole employee of the association.

The Government immediately identified the strain of the additional work load and that the association would be in need of support to keep the wheels of the association turning.

The Management Committee accepted this generous offer of assistance and we are pleased to communicate Elise Whittaker, former QBA State Secretary has been employed in a part time administrative role for a period of 6 months. We warmly welcome Elise back to the QBA and we are confident she will be a great asset to support the QBA through the immediate future.

Regards



Jacob Stevens
President
Queensland Beekeepers' Association Inc.