

## The Wrap



**BEES NEEDS:** Beekeepers want to extend an eradication program to stop an incursion of Asian bees.  
Photo: Andrew Dawson

# Asian bees threaten agriculture

Beekeepers have called for a parliamentary committee's recommendations to be adopted.

Australia's honeybee industry faces an uncertain future with beekeepers alarmed that a funding program aimed at containing an incursion of Asian bees has been scrapped.

Beekeepers from across the nation came to Parliament House to warn members and senators that abandoning the eradication program presents a food security issue.

Organisers of the 'Food Security Needs Bee Security' campaign have told parliamentarians that if the Asian bees are allowed to spread beyond their current contained Queensland location they will have a detrimental impact on European honeybees which are the lifeblood of Australia's honeybee industry.

Not only will Asian bees disrupt the European honeybees' honey production, they will also steal honey

from hives so the European honeybees may starve.

Without European honeybees to pollinate crops and pastures, billions of dollars of agricultural production could be at risk.

Honeybee experts warn that Asian bees behave differently, are not manageable and will not provide the pollination service that our agricultural and horticultural industries depend on.

Believing it's not too late to resume the eradication program and contain the spread of the Asian bee, campaign spokesman Max Whitten said they only need \$5 million a year for the next two years. "If after a year the evidence shows we are losing then at least we can say we tried and that we did everything possible," Dr Whitten said.

"The European bee is the most valuable insect we ever imported and this Asian bee is probably the worst. It will go right down the east of Australia,

across the north, down the south and it will occupy everywhere the European bee is. It will compete, it will probably wipe out our wild populations of European honeybee and it will rob and destroy managed hives," he said.

The mere presence of Asian bees in Australia has already cost Warren Taylor, from Blayney in NSW, access to lucrative US markets where he has been exporting queen and packaged bees.

"The decision to basically declare the Asian bees endemic has cost us \$2 million in exports to the United States," he said. "We've got 30 employees to think about, our overheads to cover and I don't know how we can do it without a major export market.

"I guess it's about funding. They've spent about \$3 million and destroyed around 340 nests and they must be nearly on top of it. A couple more million might well see it finished," Mr Taylor said.

He is asking parliamentarians to have a careful look at the damage this is going to do to agriculture and horticulture, extend the period of eradication and get statistical data for the next 6 to 12 months.

"If the data says we cannot eradicate it, then that's the time to declare it endemic, but not now."

Along with seeking \$5 million a year for the next two years to continue the eradication efforts, beekeepers are calling for funding to establish a Co-operative Research Centre for Bee Research and Food Security, and the implementation of the recommendations in the 2008 *More than honey* report by the House of Representatives Primary Industries Committee.

Describing the report as "brilliant", beekeepers expressed disappointment that the recommendations – including one which called for \$50 million annually to maintain healthy bee populations – have basically been ignored by government.

Jodie Goldsworthy of Beechworth Honey told parliamentarians a future with less food is a real possibility if the Asian bee is not eradicated in Australia.

"This is not primarily about honey, it's about all food varieties which rely on bees," Ms Goldsworthy said. ●

### LINKS

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[arff.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:arff.reps@aph.gov.au)  
(02) 6277 4500