

MONSONS HONEY & POLLINATION

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PO Box 251 Mildura Vic 3502

ABN 28 109 490 987

ACN 005 912 989

Committee Secretary
Queensland Parliament
sdric@parliament.qld.gov.au

14 March 2022

RE: CALL FOR SUMISSIONS – NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL – 17 March 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

We, as Monsons Honey & Pollination, have grown with Australia's multi-million dollar almond growing industry since its conception some 50 years ago, and have seen the massive growth in agriculture and its ever-increasing demand for strong healthy bees to pollinate crops.

We have worked alongside growers, to efficiently produce world-renowned quality and quantity of nuts, fruits, vegetables, and seeds, whether grown in the open, under nets or tunnels. So successful is Australia's food industry, that more and more bees are required each year, and often at the same time, such as almonds and stone fruits.

Each year we contract over 120,000 hives from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, just for almonds. More and more beekeepers are joining the team, especially from Queensland, for which we are most grateful. Queensland hives are well prepared and relied upon, especially when Victorian weather hasn't delivered the strength of hive or the number that is needed. To be frank, without Queensland hives, we would not be able to fulfil the needs of our almond farms.

Add to this the burgeoning Queensland plantings of avocados, macadamia nuts and blueberries and their dramatically increasing pollination needs, projected hive numbers are frightening. Once Queensland plantings are established and growers are offering the right price per hive, Queensland beekeepers will be pollinating in their own state, and our supply in NSW and Victoria will be at risk.

Agricultural pollinating needs are tough on beekeepers as they need to find enough bee sites to have their bees at peak strength to pollinate these crops, especially when sites are so scarce. Beekeepers have the capacity to expand if only they had enough sites to feed their bees. On top of this, flowers on these sites rarely flower each year. In fact, they may only flower once in five years of so. It all depends on flowering cycles, and weather events, such as thunderstorms on that site that trigger flowers to bloom. And as each species has different time spans between weather events and their budding and flowering, beekeepers need many sites on hand. And, just as with humans, bees require a variety of flowering species for a balanced and nutritious diet, so they perform at their best.

Bees that are prepared with a variety of nutritious honey and pollen stores respond well to most spring pollinating events and breed quickly. Which makes it so important that bees are quickly shifted to a suitable, flowering bee site as soon as pollinating blossoms wain, so hives continue to grow.

Access to National Park sites plays a crucial role in providing a place for building hive strength, for overwintering bees, for preparing bees to pollinate crops, and for continuing growth after pollinating events.

To enable beekeepers to keep supplying the pollination needs for Australia and the world's food supply, beekeepers need safe bee sites and safe chemical use, to prevent the massive bee kills that are happening on a regular basis. Keeping Forest areas open to beekeepers is essential to ensure the variety of foods we enjoy remain on our tables, that jobs remain in agriculture, that Australia benefits from the sale of produce overseas, and that socialising over good food remains for all. And as beekeepers are familiar with Australia's bush and know what it means to use it wisely and with respect, beekeepers are proven custodians of the bush, and can be trusted with the responsibility of keeping it pristine, without putting at risk the native habitat and its resources for others.

Looking back on early settlement in Australia, one wonders why our country thinks our bush needs 'locking up'. In early Sydney town, food was scarce, really scarce, and with no variety. Seeds that had been sent from England were not pollinating and producing food. Australia's native bees were not attracted to the flowers of the introduced varieties and not doing their job. So, several attempts were made to bring beehives out from England for pollination, to ensure a food supply for the colony. It wasn't easy keeping bees on a ship for several months and crossing the equator, thus putting the bees' normal yearly cycle into chaos. Finally, hives survived the long voyage, only to drown when they got here from being too close to a flooding river. Later further attempts were successful with bees introduced to Sydney and Tasmania, and then to the other States. Bees were like gold to the early settlers, and the best gift that could be given to a landowner.

It didn't take long before European honeybees had infiltrated and established themselves into every part of Australia and Tasmania. Today, you can visit the remotest of areas, and survivors from the old English bee are still there, surviving in the trees of untouched forests and in the arid centre of Australia. So, to think that bees are causing a problem in Australia's forests is hard to understand, especially as I've seen five varieties of bees and insects, including our European honey bee, on sunflowers in Thailand, all enjoying and sharing the nectar and pollen together on the one flower, and without any harassment or fuss. Maybe there should be a lot more work done on whether bees are really displacing native bees and insects and birds, as bees will still be there among the mix, happily sharing resources, whether taken into the forests by beekeepers or not.

For Australia's growing agricultural industry to grow and flourish, for Australians to have jobs, and the world to receive our excellent products, we need so many more beekeepers and hives to make it happen. This is impossible without safe bee sites, which is why we are supporting the extension of bee sites being available in Queensland Forests and National Parks, and hopefully their continued use after 2045, as populations and their needs will have increased beyond imagination.

[REDACTED]

Kind regards

Trevor Monson

Owner/Manager
MONSONS HONEY & POLLINATION

[REDACTED]

Ph: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Mail: PO Box 251 Mildura Vic 3502