

Victorian Apiarists` Association Inc.

Founded 1892 Reg. No. 8347.

“For the Advancement of Apiculture”

Publishers of *THE AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL* [Monthly] Since 1918.

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October 30, 2009.

**Forests Assessment,
Natural Resources Commission
G.P.O. Box. 4206.
Sydney. NSW. 2001.**

Re:- Riverina Bioregion Regional Forests Assessment.

Submission.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Victorian Apiarists` Association Inc [VAA] expresses interest in the Assessment to be undertaken by the NSW Natural Resources Commission. It does so having consulted the New South Wales Apiarists` Association. The VAA expression of interest has the support of the NSW peak body.

1.2 The Australian commercial beekeeping industry is highly mobile, its migratory mode of operation being largely shaped by the sporadic flowering characteristics of mainly eucalypt species flora, including the river red gum and associated species of the nation’s riverine bio- regions. For example, red gum [E. camaldulensis] on average has a “general” flowering mid summer about once every third year, to which beekeepers migrate respective apiaries, each time staying for a period of about six [6] weeks. In effect, bee sites in river red gum forests and woodlands, over say a ten [10] year period, are stocked with apiaries for a cumulative total of about 18 weeks out of a total of 520 weeks.

1.3 The NRC will appreciate therefore that State borders are not a barrier to honey production by migratory beekeepers of whichever state of origin they may be. The migratory beekeepers of NSW and Victoria extensively work the Riverina Bio Region. They operate, as floristic opportunities arise, from licensed public land bee sites, and by private treaty from freehold land. Accordingly, many Victorian beekeepers are legally required to register with NSW Agriculture in order to partly run their businesses in NSW.

1.4 The VAA expresses it’s appreciation to the NRC in granting the Association an extension of time in order to lodge these comments by Friday 30th October 2009. The following commentary addresses the published terms of reference.

2. Term of Reference No 1.

2.1 Heritage.

21.1 Victorian beekeepers have been migrating apiaries to the Riverine Bio Region red gum and woodland forests far more than 100 years, originally by horse drawn wagon.

Riverina red gum, due to higher geographical latitudes, blossom some weeks earlier than the same species in Victoria, enabling beekeepers to sometimes migrate back to Victoria and continue to produce red gum honey in given seasons. Note earlier commentary about the sporadic flowering characteristic of most eucalypt species, migration occurring on average about one season in three to red gum sites.

2.2 Economic and Social.

2.2.1 Red gum honey is one of the world's finest quality table honeys, densely textured, amber in color, its aroma and flavor embodying more than a hint of caramel. The product is eagerly sought by honey packers, often attracting premium prices at the farm gate.

2.2.2 Pollen collection by fauna [pollination], is a reward for providing pollination services to plants, which leads to fertilization of the ovule necessary for the reproductive success of plant species. River red gum pollen is collected by honey bees. It provides an important source of protein and other ingredients used in the rearing of young, healthy brood [the next generation of honey bees].

2.2.3 Honey bees reared on red gum pollen are renowned for their long term fitness and durability. Always important in the management of honey bees, this factor is assuming greater public benefit significance through the maintenance of prosperous managed honey bee colonies, that in increasing numbers are being engaged by horticulture and agriculture industries to provide human and animal food crop pollination services throughout Australia. The Bio Region's red gum and woodland forests melliferous [nectar and pollen] resources form an important component of the overall mosaic of floral resources utilized to maintain, season to season, vigorous managed honey bee populations.

2.2.4 While the national farm gate value of apiary products is assessed at \$80 million per annum, the value of structured and incidental honey bee pollination services to agriculture/horticulture production is reckoned in terms of billions of dollars, expressed through increased crop yields as a result of efficient pollination. Taking into account all plant industries including the grazing of animals, independent assessment by RIRDC 2004 found that honey bees contribute directly to between \$4 billion and \$6 billion worth of agricultural production annually, and the maintenance of 11,000 jobs.

2.2.5 Continuing access to native forests woodlands by the migratory beekeeping industry, including the red gum and woodland forests of the Bio Region , will meaningfully contribute to the capacity of the industry to adequately service growing demand for honey bee food crop pollination services in the future.

2.3 Ecologically Sustainable Management.

2.3.1 As discussed, for industry to maintain viability, it must continue to have access to Australian native forests and other melliferous lands. The value of commercially managed honey bees to the community far outweighs the direct farm gate returns to industry, because of benefits received by the community through incidental and planned pollination [fertilization] services to the food and seed crops of this nation. The native forests of Australia play a critical role in the maintenance of a strong and healthy managed honeybee population, which is the basis for the wider community's food crops pollination resource.

2.3.2 The industry's national policy document, "Honey Bees in Australian Conserved Forests", focuses in some detail on expert opinion that the working of all forest systems in Australia by the migratory apiculture industry, whose operators are based on short term occupation of respective bee sites, is sporadic in nature and occurs when the potential for floral abundance is at its peak, and

does not adversely impact on the reproductive success of native flora and fauna. Accordingly the VAA submits that managed, migratory apiculture in conserved forests is not incompatible with the objects of nature conservation.

2.3.3 Under separate cover, a copy of the national policy document, “Honey Bees in Australian Conserved Forests”, will be forwarded to the NRC for perusal.

3. Term of Reference No 2.

3.1 Conservation.

3.1.1 The VAA supports measures to conserve the river red gum and woodland forests of the Riverina Bio Region. The VAA sees the assessment by the NRC as an initiative long overdue. The cumulative impacts of various forms of historic timber harvesting and other forest management practices, compounded by water deficiencies over several decades have already impacted seriously on the reproductive success and well being of these forest systems. Consistent with existing state statutes, and because of compatibility with native conservation, historic levels of access for the sustainable practice of apiculture throughout the Riverina Bio Region should be maintained.

3.1.2 Beekeeping industry participants are men and women of the land, whose economic success depends on working closely with and in harmony with the rhythms of the land. As a result, their understanding of the natural dynamics which affect the health of the land, and its native vegetation, is profound.

3.2 Economic

3.2.1 In Victoria, statewide, 85% of the beekeeping economy is vested in the conservation of eucalypt species growing on public and freehold land. Whenever a gum tree is lost to the estate, for whatever reason, the available melliferous resource is impacted. The VAA submits similar circumstances apply for the NSW apiculture industry. The VAA does not possess firm economic data applicable to beekeeping in the Riverina Bio Region. The VAA advises the NRC it will collaborate with NSW industry colleagues in an attempt to furnish reliable data for consideration by the NRC.

3.2.2 For the information of the NRC, in July 2008, the Victorian Environment Assessment Council, (VEAC), enquiring into the future management of Victorian River Red Gum Forests, in its final report, had this to say: “The investigation area plays an important role in the Victorian apiculture industry contributing around one million dollars to the economy and supporting about 30 fulltime equivalent jobs. Apiculture is generally proposed to continue as a resource use in the investigation area and at existing apiary sites in recommended national parks. In other places where currently permitted, apiculture can continue to operate and is unaffected by VEAC’s recommendations Overall, the recommendations are not expected to have any effects on the apiculture industry. However, the viability of apiculture is inseparable from the health of the River Red Gum forests and additional environmental water to the floodplain forests will significantly benefit production for this industry.”

3.3 Ecological Sustainable use of the Bio Region.

3.3.1 Refer to commentary expressed above at 2.3, based on the science and logic, that the practice of migratory honey production in the Bio Region during periods of floral abundance is a practice compatible with the objectives of nature conservation.

4. Term of Reference No 3.

4.1 Water Management.

4.1.1 The reproductive success of river red gum is now widely acknowledged to be directly geared to the delivery of water to the estate at the right time in occasional years.

4.1.2 For many years, migratory beekeepers have noticed changes to river red gum “general” flowering frequencies, and alterations to nectar and pollen flows, perceived to be directly related to insufficient delivery of water to the estate over the long term.

4.1.3 During late winter /early spring, dependent to some extent on latitude, river red gum begins to put on new growth, and in occasional seasons, sets a crop of buds on the new growth. Bud development and new growth maturity continues over the summer months and following winter, the species flowers early/mid summer, twelve months on from bud set. In the higher latitudes of the Riverina Bio Region flowering commences in November, and in December for the lower latitudes of Victoria. The calendar date of flowering is always constant in each year of flowering.

4.1.4 Evolutionary forces have coincided natural flooding with new growth spurt, bud set, and it’s early development. It is important therefore, in attempting to assist reproductive success of red gum, that any artificial flooding of the estate must mimic nature, timed to occur during early to late spring.

4.1.5 Artificial or natural flooding of the red gum wet lands during post new year summer months in seasons when new bud has already been set, is a negative to seed production and ultimately to the species short term reproductive success. Summer watering is conducive to producing a further new growth spurt and critically, often to the shedding of buds that would have flowered the following summer. Under the circumstances of bud abortion, the species may or may not set bud the following year.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment during the assessment, the Association looks forward to further consultation with the Commission, and others, during this important initiative.

Your faithfully,

Linton Briggs
Secretary, VAA Resources Committee.

Elwyne Papworth
President, Victorian Apiarists’ Association Inc

cc:

- New South Wales Apiarists’ Association Inc
- North Eastern Apiarists’ Association Victoria Inc
- Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria
- Victorian Farmers Federation, Horticulture Branch