



AUSTRALIAN HONEY BEE INDUSTRY COUNCIL INC

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PRESS RELEASE

'The Last Free Lunch'

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC), the peak industry body representing the Honey Bee Industry in Australia today distributed honey to all Federal Parliamentarians and to the press gallery. This is part of its ongoing campaign to highlight the difficulties faced by beekeepers as a result of disease, climate change and government policy, which is hindering the Apiary Industry's ability to maintain the nation's food supply.

The Honey Bee Industry contributes around \$80 million a year directly to the Australian economy through honey and related products, but in addition the contribution of pollination services to agriculture is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually. The Chairman of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, Mr Lindsay Bourke said 'the decision to provide free honey to Federal Parliamentarians and members of the parliamentary press gallery was to alert the members of Parliament of the unprecedented challenges facing the Apiary Industry in Australia today.' Mr Bourke indicated that countries around the world – such as the United States and New Zealand were all facing challenges and declining bee numbers as a result of disease and pests and that Australia was in danger of falling into the same trap unless something was done to ensure the viability of the industry.

Mr Bourke indicated that he, in addition to providing honey to members of parliament, had asked them to address 4 issues of concern to the Honey Bee Industry, these being:

1. Further funding to eradicate the *Apis cerana* pest in Cairns Queensland
2. Continuation of increased honey bee research into pollination
3. Enhanced implementation of the 'More than Honey' Report – a bipartisan parliamentary report produced in 2008, suggesting the Federal Government could spend up to \$50 million a year assisting the industry through research and other measures to protect the Australian Industry.
4. Continued resource access for honey bees for pollination purposes.

Mr Bourke also indicated that there were some 10,000 beekeepers in Australia, with some 600,000 hives producing annually 20-30 thousand metric tonnes of honey. 'The size of the industry in honey production was minor compared to pollination, where nearly two thirds of

every balanced diet includes food which is produced from pollination by bees', said Mr Bourke.

'The straw that has broken the camel's back', said Mr Bourke 'was the decision of both State and Federal Governments under a so called consensus agreement to end attempts to eradicate the Asian Bee, *Apis cerana* in Cairns Queensland'. Mr Bourke said 'whilst there is a chance of eradicating Asian Bees, that Australia should take the chance rather than live with the consequences.'

Mr Bourke has indicated that industry's largesse was not because beekeepers were tremendously profitable or had surplus honey, but more as a sign of desperation to draw attention to issues that are not only troubling Australian beekeepers, but worldwide where a shortage of bees is putting increasing threats on the global food chain. 'It is in Australia's interest to act now, before it is too late', concluded Mr Bourke.

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Further information and background material Briefing Notes may be found at:
www.honeybee.org.au