

Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc.

"For the Advancement of Apiculture"

Publishers of *THE AUSTRALIAN BEE JOURNAL* (Monthly) Since 1918

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SUBMISSION

to

Productivity Commission Draft Report

"Impacts of Native Vegetation and Bio Diversity Regulations"

PREPARED BY THE VICTORIAN APIARISTS' ASSOCIATION INC.

February 2004.

Productivity Commission Inquiry
"Impact of Native Vegetation and Bio Diversity Regulations"
Submission to Productivity Commission Draft Report.

1. This response by the Victorian Apiarists' Association Inc to the draft report focuses mainly on the important but not well understood dynamic relationship that exists between native vegetation, the maintenance of managed honey bee populations, farm production and productivity, and the plentiful supply of many human and animal food commodities at reasonable cost to Australian and overseas consumers.
2. The VAA submits therefore, that examination of the complex science and application of honey bee crop pollination falls well within the terms of reference of the inquiry.
3. The VAA submits, the business of honey production from native forests and woodlands, including those growing on crown leasehold and freehold land also falls within the terms of reference.
4. The VAA submits, because the industry depends on the goodwill of owners and lessees of freehold and leasehold land for access to native vegetation for production purposes, it sometimes treads a very fine line between, on the one hand wanting to see as much native vegetation retained as possible, and on the other, the issue of vegetation clearance and its regulation on freehold and leasehold land that is very much a part of this inquiry.
5. The VAA submits that retention of existing native vegetation on freehold land through regulation and/or incentives provided by governments to land owners or lessees, and over time the possible expansion of native vegetation on some categories of freehold land, would if properly planned, enhance overall farm productivity. It would also strengthen the beekeeping industry's natural resource base, and its ability to provide crop pollination services to farmers, and to increase honey crops.
6. The VAA submits also, any farm operator efficient in the management of honey bees could also benefit from increased opportunity for productivity gained through on farm honey bee management.
7. The VAA submits that increasing demand for honey bee crop pollination services in some regions is beginning to exceed supply. It is therefore in the national interest for governments, increasingly pro-active in the field of nature conservation, to encourage through sensible regulation, native vegetation retention and expansion on some categories of freehold and leasehold land in order to help secure the nation's crop pollination natural resource base, along with all the other desirable outcomes.
8. The VAA agrees with the Commission's view that the current heavy reliance on regulating the clearance of native vegetation on private rural land without adequately compensating land holders or putting in place adequate incentives, has imposed substantial costs on many land holders, and this needs to change.
9. The VAA has the further view that if through regulation the wider community continues to seek retention or expansion of the native vegetation estate on freehold land, then it should help put in place the necessary further incentives that would encourage co-operatively minded land holders across the nation to participate.

10. The VAA submits, that in any government review that may arise out of this inquiry to expose the costs and benefits of conservation effort, the clarification of environmental objectives, and the process for determining land holder and community responsibilities, the ramifications of vegetation clearance, retention, or expansion would have on the beekeeping industry and the wider community benefits that flow therefrom, should be seriously taken into account.
11. The VAA submits the industry would welcome any opportunity to contribute it's expert opinion and considerable body of evidence to any such review.
12. The VAA submits, evidence previously tabled before this inquiry by the VAA goes some of the way to demonstrate the critical dependence of the industry's economy on the retention of, and access to, native vegetation growing on all land categories in all states, as well as the wider community benefits that also flow from such usage.
13. The VAA submits, the Commission's report conclusions and draft recommendations have a particular resonance with the VAA. The VAA agrees ways need to be found to relieve cost burdens of vegetation reduction on land holders rather than there simply be a redistribution of all the burdens onto tax payers through financial compensation.

The VAA agrees that if conservation of native vegetation can be made compatible with increasing landholder benefits, then more conservation effort will be provided voluntarily by land holders.

The VAA agrees with the range of incentives proposed under draft recommendation 9.6. The VAA submits it attaches a high priority to the provision of education and extension services to demonstrate to land holders the private benefits of sustainable practices. There is a place here also to drive home the message that native vegetation retention on freehold and leasehold land confers benefits on the whole community such as outlined in the opening paragraph of this submission.

It is on this basis that the VAA submits that while it agrees that land holders should bear the costs of actions that largely benefit them individually or as a group, they should not be expected to meet the costs of supplying public good environmental services that may be demanded by and largely benefit the wider community, whether it be purely for the objects of nature conservation, or for example, conserving the native floral resources on which honey bee populations largely depend in Australia.

Yours faithfully,

R McDonald Chairman
Resources Committee
Victorian Apiarists' Assoc Inc.