

. Pollination research as an example of non-industry specific R&D, and the importance of including “SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIODIVERSITY”

As a researcher of beneficial insects, I strongly urge that the remit of Rural Research Australia include “the sustainable use of biodiversity”, as an addition to the land, water and energy use already mentioned (Recommendation 6.1).

Inclusion and explicit identification of the sustainable use of biodiversity will allow an inclusive approach to high priority national rural issues. This can have important benefits for funding, in particular for issues that involve many small stakeholders across numerous industries.

Pollination research may serve as an example of the importance of including the sustainable use of biodiversity in the remit.

Many horticultural industries will incur large losses when free pollination by feral honeybees disappears due to the arrival of the Varroa mite. Our 1600 native bee species currently provide 10 -15% of total crop pollination (“Pollination Aware”, RIRDC report 10/081), and they will not be affected by the mite. In spite of this, the present funding structure provides no avenue for obtaining support for research on improved management of native pollinators in crops.

This is caused by a combination of two factors. First, the current funding structure is not supportive of cross-industry research that involves many small stakeholders, and therefore the RIRDC/HAL pollination program has very limited funds. Second, the program’s research priorities identify only issues related to honeybees, and therefore provide no room for native bee research, while any application that involves crop pollination is automatically assessed under the Pollination program. Thus, while it is generally acknowledged that crop pollination is a priority issue and that native bees are part of sustainable crop pollination, both at present and in the future, the current RDC programs do not provide options for research in this area.

The explicit inclusion of the sustainable use of biodiversity in the remit should help to prevent such unwanted outcomes.

Pollination is an example by eminence of a non-industry specific rural R&D that is relevant to promoting productive and sustainable resource use (Information request 7.1).

The budget of \$50 million per annum should allow an increase the support for sustainable use of biodiversity, and in particular for use of native pollinators, which is a currently unmet, both socially and environmentally valuable research need.

Because this type of research is non-industry specific and has very many small stakeholders, collective cross industry funding will be crucial to achieve an adequate funding basis.

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