

Beekeepers abuzz with hope that Minister Blair's message will be sweet for their businesses

Australia's biggest annual meeting of beekeepers is abuzz with expectation that the NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Mr Niall Blair, will use his speech tomorrow to announce decisive action that will secure the beekeeping industry's future.

150 of Australia's leading beekeepers have come together in Albury, NSW, to discuss a range of topics, but one issue is uppermost on everyone's lips: state government restrictions and red tape that is needlessly limiting beekeeping access to public lands, thereby threatening not only the beekeeping industry but the state's food security.

"Take Forestry Corporation's proposed system, which is unviable for beekeeping businesses," said Mr Neil Bingley, President of the NSW Apiarists' Association ([NSWAA](#)). "We will be strangled by senseless bureaucratic red tape, at a time when we're already struggling to provide enough healthy honey bees to pollinate the state's food crops."

Guaranteed access to native floral resources – such as large stands of old-growth eucalypts - is not only vital for production of good honey, but it also keeps bees healthy enough to provide the pollination services that much of the state's agricultural sector relies upon to produce food. And in NSW, many of the best native floral resources for bees are found on public lands.

"In recent years public lands access arrangements have become increasingly difficult for the beekeeping industry, for no good reason," said Mr Bingley. "There's wild variation in rules, regulations, forms and fees across the state and between agencies. From year to year there seems to be a steady decline in the quality and number of sites we can access. The sheer lack of coordination or certainty is already forcing some longstanding beekeeping families out of business."

"I ask you: is this how agencies charged with managing our state's resources for long-term sustainable use should be acting? How is strangling our essential beekeeping industry in the best interests of our state?"

After years of frustration at government inaction, the NSWAA is finally hopeful that a resolution is near.

"We've had a number of very positive conversations with Minister Blair and his advisors," continued Mr Bingley, "and there seems to be increasing awareness that secure, long-term access to nectar is as vital a resource for beekeepers as secure, long-term water allocations are for horticulturalists."

The NSWAA has a simple solution that should work for everyone: a single desk within the Department of Primary Industries that manages access to apiary sites on all NSW public lands. "A similar system operates in Western Australia and works very well," noted Mr Bingley. "Beekeepers know where they stand in terms of long-term access to sites, and barriers to newcomers entering the industry – currently almost impossible in NSW due to red tape – are significantly reduced."

Minister Blair will address the NSWAA Annual Conference at 11.45am on Friday 13th May 2016.

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About the NSWAA Annual Conference: <http://nswaa.com.au/news-and-events/annual-conference/>