

NSWAA Annual Report

NSW beekeepers experienced a challenging season. NSW has close to 880 commercial beekeepers managing 275,000 hives. The recent drought conditions continued for the season.

DPI conducted a pilot with online booking of Long Term Vacant State Forests Bee Sites. This was a great success with over 500 sites taken up by beekeepers. One drawback was that some fees were paid near the end of the site fee period, this resulted in some beekeepers paying fees twice for 13 months of bee site use. NSWAA took this matter up with forestry to no avail. This was a failing by NSWAA and I accept full responsibility for this and I apologise. There will be more releases of bee sites and NSWAA will be ensuring that pro rata bee site fees will be paid. The single desk platform is close to maturity and looks very promising.

During the year we changed website managers as we were getting a very poor service from the website designers/managers. We also changed the secretariat from Two Rivers to LRA Consulting Australia (Robyn), who was providing our secretarial services for Two Rivers.

In late October we experienced the start of the horrific bushfires. Major bushfires hit northern NSW, then in December the Batemans Bay area, followed by the Tumbarumba area of NSW in January. Over 5 million hectares were burnt. Most of the burnt areas were on public lands such as State Forests and National Parks. Several of our members lost their houses.

Many beekeepers moved their bees multiple times to avoid the fires. 5.5 million hectares were burnt with over 9,809 hives burnt and 88,094 hives lost their field bees. NSW DPI did an amazing job providing sugar and later sugar syrup for bushfire affected beehives to keep them alive immediately after the fires. Most of the State Forest areas that were burnt were highly productive apiary areas.

As a result of the bushfires and the drought, honey production in NSW was well below average. Some beekeepers travelled to Victoria to find conditions for their hives. Some of these burnt areas will not recover for up to 20 years. As a result, NSW honey production will be at least 30% below the long term average for probably 10 years.

The Federal and State Governments provided bushfire grants and loans for those affected (and their business) by bushfires. Many beekeepers were eligible for these. Some beekeepers will be changing insurers and also increasing their insurance cover.

NSWAA has lobbied National Parks and the Minister for Agriculture the Hon Adam Marshall for increased access to public resource and continued drought assistance. As a result:

- Where possible National Parks will move bee sites from burnt areas of National Park to unburnt areas of the same National Park.
- DPI NSW have been tasked with auditing all public lands for suitability for bee sites. Some State Water lands will be available for bee sites in the near future. More will follow as issues are addressed. This will be all through the single desk.
- Public Land Bee Site fee waivers continued for 2021, and
- Heavy vehicle registration fee waiver for 2021.

It has been a difficult environment to access ministers with the bushfires and now COVID-19. The executive has met in person and via teleconference with members of the opposition. There has been one teleconference with NSW Farmers.

Your executive has made submissions to government. One on coastal forestry agreements, another on Private Native Forests. A submission to the Federal Government Inquiry '\$100 billion of Agriculture by 2030'. We met with the inland railway designers and provided beekeeper input to the proposed route through the Pilliga region.

Beehives have been killed by chemical sprays as has been the case most years. Recently a couple of thousand hives were lost due to flooding in central west NSW. A heartbreak for the beekeepers who managed the drought and then avoided the bushfires. No insurance for flooding of beehives.

Extensive use of EBee has been necessary to get urgent information out to our members in a timely fashion. This included information on the fires, government bushfire support/aid and recently COVID-19 information. NSWAA has been participating in DPI COVID-19 teleconferences where we have been advocating keeping state borders open for beekeepers and overseas workers be allowed to return to Australia for the queen rearing season.

The State government has been very supportive of our industry. They have announced an \$140 million bushfire recovery package to be split between forestry, apiary, and horticulture. Some of this money will go directly to beekeepers and some will be available for industry. NSWAA is currently building submissions for industry research that will potentially increase honey prices to beekeepers.

NSW DPI released a new book Honey and Pollen Flora of South Eastern Australia written by Dr Doug Somerville. An asset for any bee business. Two notable retirements from NSW DPI are Dr Doug Somerville and Mick Rankmore who were great advocates for our industry. We thank them for their long professional advocacies for our industry.

Honeyland and NSWAA AGM/Conference has been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Fair Trading has given NSWAA permission to NOT hold an AGM in 2020. The current plan is to hold our 2021 AGM/Conference in Tamworth. These cancellations will reduce our income for the year. In accordance with our constitution, three executive stood down this year. Four people were nominated for the three positions. Due to COVID-19 a postal ballot is being held. It is healthy to have elections. All reports that were to be presented at the Conference will be on NSWAA website in May.

Unfortunately, many NSW commercial beekeepers choose not to join our Association. This is disappointing as the above shows that the executive is working on members behalf and our advocacy is saving most beekeeping businesses money in these difficult times.

NSWAA is currently lobbying to have pollination, honeybees and chemicals plus 'Plus Safe Passage of Bees Through the Crop' included on agronomy courses. Currently this is not the case. NSWAA has a good executive who look forward to the challenges of the season ahead and working with AHBIC.

Stephen Targett
President