

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 41

BEEKEEPING ON PUBLIC LAND

APRIL 1992

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE

To manage beekeeping on Crown lands, including those managed by CALM, and to manage multiple-use lands to maximise products from managed hive bees to the extent compatible with other land-uses.

BACKGROUND

Beekeeping is a small but significant industry in Western Australia, with an average annual total income in recent years of \$4.5 million (1987/88). It is also now widely accepted that honeybees add considerably to the State's economy through planned and incidental pollination of commercially exploited crops and plants. Currently some 145 apiarists hold around 2,440 registered sites on various categories of public land, for which CALM is the central registration authority and collects annual rental fees. The Department of Agriculture provides technical advice on apiculture to the industry.

Commercial beekeeping involves the short term introduction of managed populations of the introduced honeybee, *Apis mellifera* (hive bees), to areas of land to take advantage of the availability of nectar or pollen. Self-sustaining, wild populations of the same species (feral bees) are now established throughout most of the south-west land division of Western Australia and some other parts of the State.

Apiarists in Western Australia have always relied heavily on large areas of native vegetation, and are increasingly dependent upon lands managed by CALM. This almost total reliance on native plants is unusual for beekeeping in the developed world, where the major sources of nectar and pollen are often exotic "crops", such as alfalfa in the USA, and Salvation Jane in South Australia.

The expansion of agriculture in this State over the last 45 years has affected the resources available to the beekeeping industry and the areas available for nature conservation. However, this expansion of agriculture has not, to date, provided significant exotic crops which could sustain the beekeeping industry, and potentially restrictive policies relating to conservation land may limit available resources.

The beekeeping industry has potentially adverse factors to contend with in addition to the long term loss of the sources of nectar and pollen. These include large fluctuations in the price of honey, competition between full-time professional beekeepers, semi-professionals and hobbyists, and short and medium term loss of resources due to wildfires. To a lesser extent, land management practices including mining, control burning, clearfelling and dieback quarantine can also impinge on honey and pollen production.

Prior to the formation of CALM, there were different policies regarding beekeeping on State forest, national parks and nature reserves.

- (i) On State forest beekeeping was seen as compatible with most other land uses. A high level of management went into the allocation of sites, provision of access consistent with the control of dieback, and supervision to ensure satisfactory operation and maintenance.
- (ii) In national parks the placing of hives of bees was permitted provided a licence to do so had first been obtained.

Licences for placing of hives of bees in national parks were granted only if:

- no inconvenience or danger would be caused to visitors to the park;
- there was no interference with resource management; and
- no new tracks were made.

Special permission was required to camp or extract honey in a park and apiary location and transport routes had first to be approved by the Authority. The National Parks Authority also recognised the need to avoid the spread of dieback disease and excluded sites from some parks.

The National Park Authority, like the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife in the case of nature reserves, was not able to provide intensive management and supervision in the field.

- (iii) A policy for nature reserves, produced in 1983 by the then Department of Fisheries and Wildlife but never fully implemented, proposed to exclude beekeeping sites from reserves which: were outside the range of feral honeybees; were less than 500 hectares in size; did not contain sites on existing roads or on the reserve's periphery and in which beekeeping would constitute a hazard to the public; or had other specific reasons for exclusion.

Grounds identified by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife upon which specific management decisions were to be made to limit beekeeping activities on nature reserves were as follows:

- Minimising the risk of dieback (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) infection.
- The presence of major communities or species of nectarivorous or pollenivorous fauna because of the potential for adverse effects resulting from competition from honeybees.
- The presence of declared rare flora, and flora and fauna of outstanding interest.
- The presence of sites of continuing ecological research, or of importance for public use and environmental education.

The cancellation of some existing sites on nature reserves under the proposed "Fisheries and Wildlife policy" was deferred by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, at least until regrowth of vegetation in the Beekeepers' Reserve following major fires in January 1984.

Since amalgamation of the three agencies now comprising CALM, beekeeping has continued to be seen as fully compatible on CALM lands zoned for multiple use, e.g. State forest. Over the same period the more conservative guidelines adopted by the old National Parks Authority and Fisheries and Wildlife Department have usually been adopted in considering applications for new sites on national parks and nature reserves, or for proposed reserves.

Continued access to floral resources is important to the beekeeping industry and to individual beekeepers. Where it is compatible with the primary purposes of land, beekeeping should be facilitated. CALM also recognises that the Department's management practices, such as timing of control burning, have the potential to adversely effect an apiarist's use of particular areas of vegetation at a particular time.

The Beekeepers' Consultative Committee was established to provide two-way communication between the industry and CALM on many of these issues.

CALM will continue to assist the honey industry in so far as is consistent with the Department's responsibilities in conservation and land management (although there are many factors affecting the industry for which CALM does not have responsibility). The viability of the industry could be greatly enhanced by a number of actions, including structural changes encouraging better coordination within the industry and improved marketing. The most efficient use of existing resources and the potential for expanding resources, should also be addressed. This would include ensuring that all sites are used whenever possible, that spacing between sites in agreed beekeeping areas is based on appropriate ecological and managerial criteria, and that the deliberate establishment of desirable flora on private property and public land where appropriate is considered. As a matter of equity the money raised from apiary site fees should at least cover management costs incurred by the Department.

POLICY

The Department will:

1. support and administer apiculture as a legitimate and sustainable industry on appropriate CALM managed land and other Crown land by the issuing of permits, allocation of apiary sites and the designation of access, field supervision (including dieback hygiene), and regular management review of sites;
2. ensure, in consultation with the industry, apiary sites are positioned to make the best use of areas available for beekeeping and are compatible with other designated land uses;
3. liaise with apiary site holders in relation to other activities and values on CALM managed lands that could conflict with the location of hives or honey production from a site;
4. support and encourage research into the interaction of honeybees with native flora and fauna and other matters relevant to beekeeping on public lands;
5. investigate ways (including appropriate vesting) of improving the management of multiple-use lands to include beekeeping;
6. seek recoupment from the industry of all relevant costs to CALM;
7. utilise bees as appropriate to increase the seed set, for regeneration, or subsequent collection, in forest planned for harvesting;
8. manage reserved land according to area management plans where they exist but will ensure that this policy applies to all future management plans developed during the life of the policy.

STRATEGIES

1. Maintain existing apiary sites on all classes of land during a period in which CALM will endeavour to establish research into the interaction of European bees with conservation values - to be reviewed in 1995 based on and taking due regard to research results relevant to managed hives.
2. Permit no additional apiary sites (i.e. additional to the existing sites) on land reserved primarily for nature conservation purposes, during a period of research (as above) (unless there are exceptional circumstances), to be reviewed in 1995 based on and taking due regard to research results relevant to managed hives.

3. Locate/relocate apiary sites at acceptable intervals, taking account of constraints such as the following:
 - 3.1 That suitable vehicular access to the apiary site exists or can be constructed consistent with guidelines.
 - 3.2 The need to avoid transference of disease, including dieback, and diseases of honeybees.
 - 3.3 The occurrence of declared rare flora/fauna or of special species or assemblages of nectarivores and pollenivores.
 - 3.4 Proximity of current or proposed activity to CALM or public facilities.
 - 3.5 Risk of water pollution or soil degradation caused by beekeepers' activities.
 - 3.6 Requirements of other authorities controlling Crown land or Government reserves.
 - 3.7 Relevant Acts and Regulations.
4. Take steps to control the numbers of feral bees on land managed for the primary purpose of nature conservation.
5. Make available the Departments prescribed burning program each year to industry and copy the Government Apiculturist.
6. Convene a Beekeepers' Consultative Committee to regularly provide two-way communication between the industry and CALM on matters of mutual interest including site rental fees. Continue liaison with other authorities that control Crown land on which apiary sites are located.
7. Require occupiers of registered sites to fully comply with notice of hive ownership as required by the Beekeepers' Act Regulations.
8. Implement as appropriate on all CALM lands a system of permanent signposting showing apiary site number.
9. In consultation with industry develop a code of practice to cover behaviour and rules on various lands.
10. Encourage the development of additional nectar sources on private property.
11. CALM will periodically use bees as a mechanism to achieve its silvicultural objectives, for seed set, or seed collection. At this time, CALM will use the nearest site owner for this purpose, or, with the written permission of the site owner, use the Temporary Occupancy guidelines to enable another apiarist to be used.

CALM may also temporarily issue sites within DRA, to achieve this purpose, providing this can be managed without compromising forest hygiene.
12. In the case of Beekeepers Reserve 24496 CALM will investigate ways of including beekeeping in the purpose and investigate appropriate vesting in consultation with other relevant authorities.

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Distribution Lists: A, B, D, E & L