

Busy bees

We are the only continent without the deadly *Varroa destructor* mite which wrecks honey bee hives. But that almost changed...

Words **ELLOUISE BAILEY**

The dreaded parasites stowed away in a container ship from the United States. Disaster was averted in June when Port of Melbourne authorities discovered that *Varroa destructor* had infected a colony of bees nesting on the ship, and swiftly took action with insecticide.

In some countries, the mite has destroyed 95-100% of unmanaged European honey bee hives. Australia produces world-class honey and keeping the pest out is vital to the industry.

Australian Honey Bee Industry Council executive director Trevor

Weatherhead says beekeeping is on the rise, driven by steady commercial growth and hobbyists concerned about declining bee populations. In the past year alone, he says there has been an increase of more than 4,000 registered beekeepers. Roughly a third are in NSW.

And bees don't simply produce honey. Two-thirds of agricultural output depends on bee pollination, including tree nuts, fruit and vegetables. About 200,000 hives are used in Australia for paid pollination services and every August many of these are deployed to the NSW Riverina for the almond crop.

AUSTRALIAN HONEY

PRICE
Farmgate price
\$4.80/kg.



Australian industry worth \$100 million.

Honey prices have risen due to a shortage caused by drought, hot weather and bushfires.



The number of registered beekeepers has risen by 4,000 since August 2017.

POLLINATION SERVICES

VALUE
\$14 billion
Average value of honey bees to agriculture (pollinating crops).



65% of agricultural production in Australia depends on pollination by honey bees.

Crops such as almonds are 100% reliant on honey bees for pollination.



1822 European honey bees introduced to Australia.

Many commercial beekeepers rely on Crown land, including state forests and national parks, to maintain their hives.

PRODUCTION & EXPORT

MAIN EXPORT MARKETS
China, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada and Hong Kong (2016-17).



Australia's annual honey production 20,000 to 30,000 tonnes.

70% of Australian honey is derived from eucalyptus species.

To be considered a fully commercial enterprise, a keeper must have at least 400 hives.

15,000

Number of registered beekeepers nationally.



Sources: Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, NSW Department of Primary Industries Apiculture Industry Overview 2015, Curtin University