

September 2025

Submission: 2025 Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL)

ANZSCO Apiarist: 121311

Executive Summary

This submission responds to the targeted consultation on the 2025 Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL) and provides an evidence-based perspective on industries challenges, workforce needs and our significant representation of Australia's apiary industry. AHBIC highlights low statistical national vocational graduate numbers, varroas impact on business growth and scale, predicted increase in pollination demand, and the disconnect between workforce demand and available domestic skills training to support industries significant national contribution to food security. We fundamentally outline below to substantiate our submission request to include Apiarist on the CSOL in 2025.

Key recommendations include improving opportunities in workforce immigration into Australia by recognising apiarists as a core skills stream occupation under CSOL.

- The apiary industry underpins Australian horticulture and agriculture sectors contributing to estimated \$4.6 billion national production via critical pollination services.
- The supply of professional apiarists in the honey bee industry is currently insufficient.
- AHBIC identifies a growing demand for migrant professionals in the honey bee industry.
- AHBIC strongly recommends that beekeeping remain on the CSOL list.

Introduction

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) is an independent, not for profit, national peak industry body. AHBIC has been protecting and promoting the Honey Bee and Pollination industry for more than 24 years. AHBIC represents beekeepers and members of the Australian beekeeping industry to all levels of government, private enterprise and the public. Our national membership-based beekeeping groups include association's from all states of Australia, Specialist Pollination and Queen Bee Breeders groups, the recreational beekeeping sector and those who buy, package and market our honey. AHBIC's member bodies include:

- New South Wales Apiarists Association
- Queensland Beekeepers Association
- Victorian Apiarists Association
- Tasmanian Beekeepers Association
- South Australian Apiarists Association
- Bee Industry Council of Western Australia
- Crop Pollination Association of Australia
- Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association
- Australian Honey Packers and Marketer's Association
- Amateur Beekeepers Australia

The Australian Honey Bee industry is a strong and vibrant industry that generated \$640 million in farm gate value in 2023 and contributes billions to greater agricultural sector through pollination services. A key driver of the industry prosperity is maintaining a strong workforce. The average age of beekeepers is 52 compared to the all job average of 40 (labourmarketinsights.gov.au). The supply of professional apiarists in the honey bee industry is currently not enough to replace the aging workforce and does not sufficiently represent the demand on beekeeping commercial businesses to sustain national pollination demand into the future.

Domestic workforce measures insufficient

A workforce shortage in the honey bee industry, evident across all jurisdictions, constitutes a pressing issue with significant implications for both current operations and future sustainability. This is demonstrated by the 'Skills Priority List' showing an increasing demand for skilled beekeeping professionals from all jurisdictions over recent time. Beekeeping as a vocational profession, is not in the top 5 training undertaken across Australia's vocational statistics within the [NCVER](#) report. In addition to this, recent [NCVER](#) statistics shockingly identify the agriculture training package, of which the beekeeping vocational training is a nominal inclusion, makes up a meagre 2% of the 5 million enrolments nationally in 2024. Industries biggest challenge with this is that vocational education in its nature predominantly focuses on early career development, unfortunately this has been insufficient in meeting the apiary industry demand.

We have investigated domestic data independently across 3 main RTO's with Certificate III Beekeeping on scope, which showed apiarist graduates nationally in 2024 came to a total of 55 individuals, with no assurance of commercial employment aspirations or work placement post completion. Measures taken to rectify this known emerging skills shortage for our industry domestically have unequivocally failed to deliver the intended objectives.

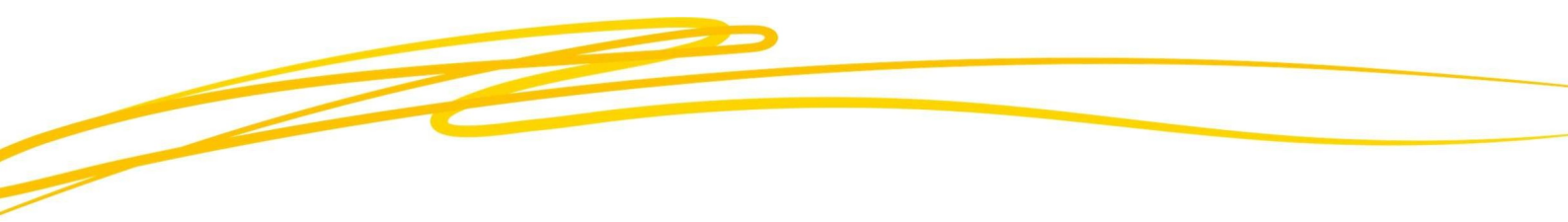
Current utilisation of migrant workers

The honey bee industry is made up of 1,500 commercial beekeeping businesses and 45,500 recreational/micro businesses across the country. Sadly, the solid data, sought by JSC Migration Modelling, on labour is poorly represented for the honey bee industry. However industry feedback is clear, the AHBIC membership base, through our 2025 Annual General Meeting, identified access to skilled workforce, including a streamlined and efficient skilled migrant pathway, as one of industries top 4 biggest challenges.

The growing trend toward larger, corporate-style businesses in the honey bee industry is resulting in greater utilisation of migrant professional worker schemes to fill the shortfall in domestic labour markets. According to [LabourMarketInsights.gov.au](https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au), 87% of honey bee businesses are based in regional Australia, where access to professional apiarists has been clearly identified as restrictive.

Many larger businesses currently engage with the PALM scheme; for unskilled labour and exact figures on the scale of utilisation remain unavailable. However, Australia's commercial operators seeking to maintain viable businesses face continued challenges in employment commencement for appropriately skilled professionals.

If the honey bee sector is unable to maintain a reliable pool of skilled professionals, scaling operations or adopting innovative practices becomes increasingly difficult limiting the industry's capacity for sustainable growth. This, in turn, stalls the sector's ability to meet rising demand, weakens its contribution to the broader agricultural supply chain, and undermines its potential to support a stronger regional and national economy.



Changes in the Honey Bee Industry that will drive professional apiarist demand

The Australian honey bee industry underpins national agricultural production, with 65% of all horticultural crops dependent on honey bee pollination services. This reliance is growing—particularly following the recent incursion of Varroa mite, which has now spread to five of Australia's eight states and territories.

Rabo Research's report, *How Varroa Mites Might Impact Australian Pollinators* (11 April 2025), highlights the serious challenges facing not only by the honey bee industry but also pollination dependent producers. International data from Canada, New Zealand, and the United States shows Varroa-related colony declines of 25%, 40%, and 40% respectively in the decades following its introduction. A similar trajectory in Australia would severely compromise the industry's ability to support key sectors of agriculture.

Australia cannot afford a comparable decline in hive numbers. As demand for pollination services rises, driven by the maturation of existing plantings into 2030 and expansion of commercial cropping acres, Rabo Research forecasts that Australia's current 600,000 commercial hives will need to increase by one-third by 2030. Meeting this growth target is impossible without a skilled workforce to support it.

Conclusion

The Australian honey bee industry is of national importance yet faces a recognised shortage of domestically trained skilled professionals. As the horticultural sector becomes increasingly dependent on pollination services, this risk of shortage in both labour and colonies poses a growing risk to Australia's food security. At the same time, the presence of Varroa mite is driving the unprecedented need for more specialised expertise within the industry.

Without intervention, the apiary industry will fall short of the pollination demand required by an expanding agricultural sector. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) is raising the alarm: workforce shortages represent a critical risk to both the honey bee industry and the wider agricultural economy. It is therefore essential that the honey bee industry remains on the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL), so we may have an opportunity to meet the visions and key objectives within Australia's Migration Strategy to ensure strong efficient support for continued access to skilled professionals and to safeguard Australia's food security.

Yours sincerely,

