



September 2025

**Submission to Jobs and Skills Australia on the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List**

**Occupation: Apiarist (Beekeeper) – ANZSCO 121311**

**Introduction**

Goldfield Honey Australia Pty Ltd welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) consultation. We strongly recommend the continued inclusion of the occupation Apiarist (Beekeeper – ANZSCO 121311) on the CSOL.

Our submission is informed by over four decades of direct experience in commercial apiculture, encompassing honey production, pollination services, queen breeding, and regional employment. It also draws on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Jobs and Skills Australia, AgriFutures Australia, RaboResearch, and commentary from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, among others.

Goldfield Honey Australia Pty Ltd is a vertically integrated commercial beekeeping business operating approximately 12,000 managed hives, with a growth strategy targeting 15,000 hives over the next five years. Based in Vittoria, NSW, we supply both bulk and branded honey products and provide large-scale pollination services to horticultural and broadacre clients throughout NSW and Victoria.

Our operations are labour-intensive and seasonally responsive. We employ and train apiarists in hive management, disease control, queen breeding, honey extraction, and biosecurity compliance. These roles demand advanced practical skills, deep ecological knowledge, and high levels of autonomy. Finding and retaining suitable staff has historically been difficult, particularly in regional areas where our work is based. We therefore rely heavily on skilled migration from overseas.

**Labour Market Realities and Constraints**

The occupation of apiarist is small in absolute numbers but critical in function. According to Jobs and Skills Australia, approximately 1,600 individuals were employed as beekeepers nationally as of the 2021 Census, with a median age of 49 years. This indicates a workforce that is both limited in scale and skewed toward older age brackets, highlighting the risk of attrition and limited generational renewal (Australia J. &., 2021)

Goldfield Honey has conducted ongoing in-house labour market testing over several years, including structured hiring campaigns and seasonal recruitment cycles. We have recently engaged a licensed migration agency to assist with workforce planning and to broaden the search for suitably qualified Australian candidates.

Our consistent finding is that genuine, appropriately skilled domestic applicants are extremely limited. Across recruitment platforms - both general job boards and agricultural-specific services - most respondents are either underqualified, not locally based, or unwilling to work in the physically demanding conditions of our industry.



By contrast, the majority of genuine applicants we receive are international candidates with professional apiculture experience in their home countries. These applicants often demonstrate:

- deep commitment to beekeeping as a long-term career,
- experience managing hives at scale,
- practical skills in dealing with biosecurity risks such as varroa, and
- prior involvement in pollination services.

Without a clear migration pathway through the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL), our ability to engage these highly motivated candidates is constrained. This further limits our capacity to scale operations and to respond to seasonal demand fluctuations.

Industry-wide evidence reinforces these findings. AgriFutures Australia identifies workforce shortages as one of the most significant risks to the productivity and long-term sustainability of both the honey and pollination sectors ( (Australia A. , 2023)). RaboResearch 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. ( (RaboResearch, 2025)).

These pressures underscore the critical role of skilled apiarists in maintaining hive health, managing the threat of varroa, and coordinating the safe and timely movement of hives across regions. Without access to a reliable pipeline of qualified beekeepers - particularly through continued recognition of Apiarist (ANZSCO 121311) on the CSOL- the sector faces escalating labour shortages that could directly impact national pollination capacity and therefore Australia's food security. This would exacerbate already tight margins, increase input costs, and threaten both crop yields and agricultural resilience.

### **Biosecurity Pressure and the Varroa Threat**

The apiarist role demands more than routine hive oversight. Key responsibilities include:

- disease and pest monitoring (notably American foulbrood, hive pests, and now varroa mite),
- queen rearing,
- strategic site placement,
- hive nutrition management,
- floral forecasting,
- biosecurity compliance, and
- adaptive responses to climate and environmental variation.

These specialist skills are not readily substitutable by general farm labour.

A new dimension of risk is presented by the national varroa mite incursion. In *"Bee sting: the varroa-mite incursion is a biosecurity warning"*, (Henderson, 2025) argues that the outbreak has exposed Australia's

vulnerability to biosecurity threats: “modelling indicated pollination in Australia could fall substantially below demand within three to five years.”

Henderson links varroa not only to agricultural impact but also to national resilience and food security. The article warns of increased costs of beekeeping, upward pressure on pollination rates, margin squeeze for growers, and reductions in hive numbers - as seen in other countries such as New Zealand and Canada, which experienced declines of ~8% over 4–5 years following varroa’s arrival.

For businesses such as Goldfield Honey Australia Pty Ltd, managing varroa places additional burdens on technical capacity, vigilance, disease surveillance, and response protocols. It intensifies the demand for highly skilled apiarists capable of implementing biosecurity strategies and maintaining hive viability under pressure.

### **Conclusion**

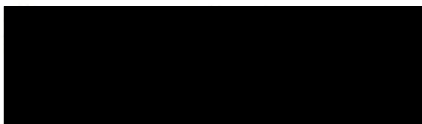
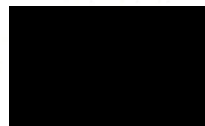
Australia’s beekeeping and pollination sectors face increasing labour and biosecurity pressures that cannot be addressed without access to skilled workers. The role of Apiarist (ANZSCO 121311) is critical to maintaining hive health, supporting pollination-dependent industries, and ensuring national food security.

Goldfield Honey Australia Pty Ltd urges Jobs and Skills Australia to:

1. Retain Apiarist (ANZSCO 121311) on the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL)

Accurate recognition is essential to support industry resilience, biosecurity, and regional workforce development.

Yours sincerely,



### **References**

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