

Submission to the Draft Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL)

ANZSCO Apiarist: 121311

Executive Summary

- The honey bee industry underpins the agricultural sector via pollination.
- The supply of professional apiarists in the honey bee industry is currently not enough to replace the aging workforce.
- AHBIC identifies a growing demand for migrant professionals in the honey bee industry.
- AHBIC strongly recommends that the 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 23 years. AHBIC represents beekeepers and members of the Australian beekeeping industry to all levels of government, private enterprise and the public. AHBIC's member bodies include membership-based beekeeping groups from:

- All states of Australia
- Specialist Pollination groups
- Specialist Queen Bee Breeders
- Those who buy, package and market our honey
- Representatives of the expanding recreational beekeeping sector

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.





Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc

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www.HoneyBee.org.au

A workforce shortage, in the honey bee industry, has been identified across all jurisdictions and is an increasing problem. This is demonstrated by the 'Skills Priority List' showing an increasing demand for labor from all jurisdictions over recent time.

Current utilisation of migrant workers

The honey bee industry is made up of 2,000 commercial beekeeping businesses and 47,000 recreational/micro business across the country. Solid data on labor demand is low for the honey bee industry, however industry feedback is clear. The AHBIC membership base has identified access to professional apiarists as a key constraint to business expansion alongside floral resource access. They also identify access to migrant professionals as difficult through the existing schemes.

The growing trend for larger corporate style businesses in the honey bee industry is resulting in greater utilisation of the migrant professional worker schemes to fill the shortfall in domestic labor markets. labormarketinsights.gov.au identifies that 87% of honey bee business are based in regional Australia where access to professional apiarists has been clearly identified as restrictive. Many larger business currently engage in the PALM scheme for unskilled labor and skilled visa scheme to source migrant workers. We do not have absolute numbers on utilisation but we have seen an increase in beekeepers engaging these schemes to source labor and professionals.

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

The honey bee industry underpins the Australian agricultural industry as 65% of all horticultural crops rely on honey bee pollination services. This reliance is growing, particularly with recent incursion of Varroa mite into Australia. We estimate this new pest will severely restrict our industry's ability to meet the requirements of the pollination dependent industries. This will be largely driven by the expected decimation of the feral bee populations that currently provide free pollination services growers. This shortfall in service provision will need to be taken up by managed colonies through expansion of the current industry capabilities.

Expanding industry capability will require greater access to professional apiarists and unskilled labor. Due to the transient nature of the work. Fulfilling the workforce shortages with domestic labor markets continually creates challenges. It is critically important that the honey bee industry remains on the Core Skills Occupation List to prioritise access to additional skilled labor markets.





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Conclusion

The Australian honey bee industry is at a critical juncture in time. New significant pest challenges will place unprecedented pressure on pollination services supply in a period when existing business find it challenging to meet labor needs through the domestic markets. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council strongly recommends that Apiarists remains as an identified occupation on the CSOL list.

Yours sincerely,

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Australian Honey Bee Industry Council

