

Criticism of SNIBG Dec / Jan Newsletter

I am sorry but some of us older beekeepers have been there, seen that before. We saw a good Commodity Levy supporting research, marketing and administration turned into just a Levy to support the running of NBA whose executive lost the support of the majority of the beekeepers. We had a 100 year history with the NBA so we are wary.

As an industry we have been used by Government to experiment on. The removal of subsidies were first taken off beekeepers to see how we would fare and when we didn't fall over, subsidies were removed from the whole farming sector.

Karin is quite correct in saying the Australian levy is 4.2 cents per kg. It's made up of a number of different sections and is combined under one levy. Levies in Australia can only be collected by the Government and their Levy Order has a higher threshold as the Govt charges make it uneconomic to collect from beekeepers producing less than 1500 kg

Yes, they can produce three to five times as much as New Zealand beekeepers in a good year but they don't have that many good years. Beekeepers have been shut out of the forests and some national parks. A lot of the 600 year old trees they depend upon have been milled. They have to move hives twice for each flow they want to exploit. Once to the coast to top the hives up with pollen and build brood and then on to the flow which could be 10 hours away. Their running costs are high. Really good flows happen 12 months after floods. At the moment they are into the third year of drought but they are really good beekeepers.

Australia also allows imports of foreign honey so the price of honey is low. Australian beekeepers get roughly \$3 - \$4.00 per kg for their honey. \$8 for manuka type honeys.

When this Levy was proposed, we were getting \$10 per kg for most types of honey. Now the talk is our honey price is dropping to the world commodity price, about \$5 per kg. (Some are still offering \$6.50). Brexit is having an impact. When there's lots of unsold honey, the price being offered generally falls. Our proposed levy is for 10 cents (plus GST).

Basically we were first told that if we had regular funds for research, Govt would be more sympathetic to funding our projects. This is the basis behind the Commodity Levy which most beekeepers supported but it's morphed into a Levy to satisfy all the wish lists.

Beekeepers have to look at the bottom line. For the smaller beekeeper with up to 400 hives, their cost of production is high. I remember when our cost of production was higher than the price being offered for bush honey. We survived on savings. Another 10c per kg would have swamped us.

Then there is the perceived unfairness of the levy. The mānuka guys are not going to contribute very much to this levy in proportion to the value of their honey. The majority is going to be paid for by the pastoral beekeepers who have to produce more kilograms to earn the same income as a mānuka producer. (Where is the break-down of what each group of beekeepers will pay)?

If ApiNZ represented all beekeepers, they would have asked how this levy will impact on all the different sized beekeeping businesses at varying prices of honey. Why didn't those beekeepers on the Board ask for this. They must have seen the possibility of a down turn coming when the Mānuka Regulations came in. We are a conservative lot having to survive periods of drought so have to watch the pennies.

From the News letter - The levy on honey is 2.3 cents per kilogram of honey sold.

I wrote that they were paying 2.3 cents for the commodity part of the levy. I excluded the other parts as we will be asked to pay for these later, but as yet, we haven't had that discussion. I.E. We have signed a GIA Memorandum of Understanding but we have yet to commit to GIA as all beekeepers will have to approve this also with a vote.

In one way Karin was correct and I was wrong. The figure should have been 1.5 cents for R&D which is the commodity part of the levy, (excluding any administration costs).

Biosecurity is carried out on behalf of NZ INC's (the people of New Zealand) by MPI as they protected our country. GIA is where biosecurity should come in. It shouldn't be part of a commodity levy unless ApiNZ is going to commit us to that with this levy.

I now see from the voting paper that Biosecurity is no longer going to be part of this Levy, but Karin in looking at the Australian Levy didn't split out the GIA component.

I have left the following information in. Although it can be disregarded at this time, but its always good to see how our neighbour's levy works and since changing from the Animal Health group to the Plant Health group (which it's more aligned with as some of their crops depend upon bee pollination), the beekeeping biosecurity activities have gone ahead in leaps and bounds and perhaps now leads the world.

Under a GIA we will ask for proper surveillance of high risk areas. Not the present "once a year" survey that is basically for Trade Assurance. Why haven't we got beetle harbourage's in hives near high risk areas for early detection. Nobody has been looking after the bee side. It's just been about trade. AsureQuality has been run down with user pays and because their charges represent Govt charges. You might have heard that chippies are working for \$35 per hour in CHCH down from \$55. Well that's what our Government expects us to work for and we are just as skilled when it comes to looking in bee hives.

We need a proper diagnostic service. When I see something in a hive that looks like EFB, I want to know what it is. At the moment you call the Hot Line, send in a sample and they will tell you "it's negative for EFB". Good, but what am I seeing? Is it a virus (new or old), is it varroa mite related, a queen problem or nutrition problem? This is the type of service we require. We shouldn't have to go to a private lab.

It would be nice to carry on the MPI funded pathogen programme which is just finishing.

MPI put us, "bees" under animals. All animals in MPI have vets. Bees to NZ are worth 5 billion. WHERE ARE OUR 8-10 COMPETENT BEEKEEPING VETS TO SERVICE OUR INDUSTRY. (Sorry getting off the subject).

The Aust 4.2 cents per kg if comparable in NZ would cover GIA, and the Commodity Levy for research. (AFB is funded by the State Governments in Australia).

NRS Nations Residue Survey: Their levy pays for the residue survey testing. In New Zealand RMP Beekeepers pay for residue testing.

EPPR (Emergency Plant Pest Response) is administered by Plant Health Australia, part of their GIA and is for incursion response. They are actively looking for varroa mite, tracheal mite, tropilaelaps clareae, Asian bees (isolated to Cairns) wasps and hornets. Volunteers collect samples every two to three months from hives around the ports and send them in. They have just held an exercise for a varroa incursion.

In NZ, Government at the moment pays this but industries are being asked to contribute more to biosecurity via GIA. To repeat this is where this discussion takes place. If we collect a levy for MPI, we want this type of service as we will be part funding it.

The Forestry Industries set a Commodity Levy which was reduced slightly last year. They have joined GIA. They already have an active surveillance programme in the forests to protect their monoculture (run by a private biosecurity firm); \$5m is collected over three years. Now MPI under GIA wants part of that money for MPI's "over-site" of biosecurity without contributing much more. Most of MPI's work is contracted out as they no longer have experts on the ground, just policy people in offices on high salaries.

The Australian's peak industry body (Australian Honey Bee Industry Council Inc. - AHBIC) only gets funding to cover their secretariat (one person, a part time job). They meet every two months with State Beekeeping bodies paying for their representative's expenses.

So in Karin's Friday post, she wasn't actually comparing apples with apples.

A commodity levy should have been jointly planned and organised by all the beekeeping groups. ApiNZ took the lead but didn't consult until they went public. This type of activity can only lead to continued bickering within the industry. ApiNZ has not taken the lead to unite the beekeeping industry believing it will out survive other groups. Companies come and go but family businesses in this industry carry on.

Yes, ApiNZ's proposal has some very good points but I believe it goes way beyond what was actually wanted in the first place. Most beekeepers just wanted money for research.

Unlike the brochure that came with the voting paper, the voting paper does not have sections tied to a percentage of the money collected, so the ApiNZ Board and committees could spend the money where they decide for the next six years with some input from beekeepers at the AGM.

The industry is now facing a downturn. Three years in a row without a good mānuka crop for some. In fact this season is far worse for East Coast beekeepers where it was dry. In the north and west it has been wet and so a lot of bushes didn't flower. Northland beekeepers are referring to it as a "mānuka ghost crop". They have been feeding since Christmas.

In Northland a large number of business are for sale. Bigger business are restructuring. Some have been told by their bank to quit now. I feel for the small beekeeper who put everything into beekeeping on the MPI's inflated forecast of an ever increasing mānuka crop. We are connected to the farming sector and like them we depend mostly on the weather. There are always ups and down. This down is going to hit harder than most.

It's up to the individual beekeeper to decide how he or she votes. Is 10cents per kg going to give you value for money?

Will you have the cash flow to pay the levy in October each year, even if your crop is unsold. Will the packers go back to drip feeding you the money instead of paying up front now that the mānuka bubble has burst. (Beekeepers being the bankers for the packers again?)

There is still a massive amount of work to do to get our industry on an even keel with a united front. There has to be give and take on all sides. The way ApiNZ has formulated this proposal hasn't helped with this unity.