

Responsible Beekeeping



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Introduction

Responsible beekeeping involves a range of practices that help to keep your honey bees healthy and productive while minimising the potential harm or nuisance they may cause to other people. It also involves complying with the law, in this case the NSW Apiaries Act 1985.

Whilst most commercial beekeeping is carried out in rural areas, a lot of beehives are kept in towns in their owner's backyard. Keeping beehives in backyards increases the chance of the bees stinging other people. While bee stings generally don't concern beekeepers they can be very painful and annoying to other people. In cases where a person is allergic to bee stings, a sting can have very serious consequences.

Legal requirements

Keeping bees in NSW means complying with the requirements of the NSW Apiaries Act 1985. Failure to comply with the law can result in prosecution or the issue of an 'on the spot' fine. The key requirements of the Act are:

- Beekeepers must be registered in NSW. The 'Beekeepers application form' is available at your local office of NSW DPI, or you can visit NSW DPI's website at:

<http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/honeybees>
- Beehives must be identified. Beekeepers are required to brand all their brood boxes with their registration number within 60 days of receipt of the number.
- Honey, honeycomb and hives must not be left exposed in a way that allows robber bees access to the honey.
- Beekeepers may be directed to remove some or all of their hives if the apiary is located where bees threaten public health and safety or cause a public nuisance.
- It is an offence to keep bees which you know or suspect to be infected with the disease American foulbrood (AFB). Beekeepers must contact NSW DPI within 24 hours if they become aware that their hives are infected with AFB.

Nuisance bees

Beehives kept in close proximity to other people, homes, public buildings and sporting facilities may become a nuisance. Under the NSW Apiaries Act a person can lodge a complaint with the Director-General of NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) if they feel your bees are causing a nuisance. If a complaint is received the matter will be investigated by an apiary inspector.

The inspector may ask you to move some of your hives to another site. The Director-General of NSW DPI has the power to direct you to move some or all your hives to another site if they are posing a threat to public health and safety. You have the right to appeal any decisions or actions but the best course of action is to avoid circumstances where your bees may cause a nuisance in the first place.

The Beekeeping Code of Practice in NSW identifies some strategies to help keep your bees healthy and to encourage the keeping of bees in a way that is compatible with your location and in a way that is acceptable to the general public, including the following:

- Beekeepers must obtain permission from the owners of private lands or from the authority of government-controlled lands before placing beehives on such lands.
- Talk to your neighbours about beekeeping. This is best done before you start beekeeping on your property. Be prepared to discuss any problems they may have with it.
- Bee flight paths should be above 2 metres when crossing property boundaries. This may be achieved by using a barrier such as shrubs, walls, hedges or fences.
- Consider other people when working your hives. Plan your hive work to cause the least disturbance to your bees. Angry bees are more likely to sting.
- Keep only docile strains of bees.
- Site hives in a warm, sunny location to enhance the health of bees.
- Provide water for the bees.
- Use escape boards to remove honey rather than shaking, brushing or blowing methods.

- Control swarming. Options include re-queening your hives, population control and splitting into smaller hives (temporarily).
- Keep the apiary neat and tidy.
- Take care when mowing around hives. If the bees are active, use a smoker.
- Beehives should not be positioned in the front yard of houses. Where possible, beehives should be positioned out of sight of the public.
- Hives should not be located close to schools, childcare centres, hospitals, sporting grounds or other public facilities.

Hive numbers

Individual circumstances will determine how many hives can be kept on your property. In a rural location it may be possible to keep as many hives as you can properly manage. For most backyard beekeepers, two well-managed hives will provide enough honey for the average family. More than two hives in a suburban backyard will increase the possibility of the bees causing a nuisance to your neighbours.

The Beekeeping Code of Practice in NSW provides the following information on hive numbers. It is a guide only and circumstances may allow more or less hives to be kept. In some circumstances, the keeping of bees may be inappropriate in some locations, as determined by an appropriate regulatory authority. Contact your local council to see if they have any specific requirements for keeping honey beehives.

Definition: A hive is a colony of bees headed by a queen bee.

Small block	2 hives
Average block (up to 1000 m ²)	4 hives
Up to 2000 m ²	8 hives
Rural	No limit

Disease

American foulbrood or AFB is a bacterial disease which affects hive brood. AFB is controllable only by destruction of the colony and either the burning, deep burial or gamma irradiation of the equipment. If left unchecked AFB will eventually kill all the hives in your apiary and will spread to other hives within flying distance of your hives.

AFB is a notifiable disease under the NSW Apiaries Act. This means you are required to contact NSW DPI within 24 hours of finding, or suspecting, there is an infection of AFB in your apiary. If you fail to take measures to control AFB you may commit an offence under the NSW Apiaries Act. Compensation may be payable to registered beekeepers for losses resulting from an AFB infection, under certain circumstances.

Australia is free of devastating parasitic mites such as varroa and tracheal mites. It is illegal to introduce live bees into Australia without approval. A quarantine facility is available for persons wishing to introduce queen bees.

More information

For more information on disease control and the legal requirements of beekeeping in NSW contact your local NSW DPI office. A NSW DPI Apiary Officer or Regulatory Officer can help you with your enquiry.

NSW DPI offices:

Sydney	Phone: 02 9764 3311
Richmond	Phone: 02 4588 2100
Bathurst	Phone: 02 6330 1200
Gunnedah	Phone: 02 6741 8333
Tamworth	Phone: 02 6763 1206
Alstonville	Phone: 02 6626 2400
Goulburn	Phone: 02 4828 6600

Or, if you have access to the internet, NSW DPI's website contains a lot of information for beekeepers. You can access this information at:

<http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/honeybees>

Membership of a beekeeper's association is an excellent way of obtaining information as well as meeting other beekeepers. Recommended contacts include:

- The NSW Apiarists' Association.
Ph 02 9631 3934, fax 02 9631 0585
Email nswaa@bigpond.net.au

For amateur beekeepers in the Sydney area:

- Amateur Beekeeper's Association (Inc)
Ph 02 9631 5647
Email ronangeo@optusnet.com
- North Shore Beekeepers' Association (Inc)
Ph 02 9449 7115

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The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (August 2005). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.