

Commercial & recreational apiary industry biosecurity management in

Operation Brass Monkey | Bathurst & district apiary inspections

Purpose

Bathurst and surrounding districts have a considerable commercial and recreational apiary industry. Weak or poorly managed hives present a potential source of pests and disease for the apiary industry.

Operation Brass Monkey concentrated extensively on inspections of recreational beekeepers. The operation was conducted by Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance officers and focused on:

- inspecting live bee colonies for notifiable contagious brood diseases; and
- checking compliance with registration requirements under the [Biosecurity Regulation 2017](#).

Action was taken if any disease was identified, thus preventing, controlling and managing the negative impacts of pests and diseases to commercial and recreational apiary enterprises.

Background

Weak and diseased beehives have the potential to be robbed by healthy bees. This increases the risk of brood diseases, such as American Foul Brood (AFB), spreading to other hives situated within flight range.

The [Biosecurity Act 2015](#) and the [Biosecurity Regulation 2017](#) allows DPI to take compliance and enforcement action against beekeepers to ensure biosecurity threats are managed and risks are mitigated against their [general biosecurity duty](#).

This operation aimed to address risks associated with keeping weak and diseased hives in residential and peri urban environments. This mandatory biosecurity duty can impact other amateur and/or hobbyist's apiaries and the health of other commercial hives.

Further, the operation aimed to raise awareness, provide education and undertake enforcement against beekeepers that posed a biosecurity risk to other apiarists.

What we did

During September 2018, a total of 328 brood inspections were conducted as part of Operation Brass Monkey. These inspections were a mix of recreational beekeepers and commercial operators. Inspections were carried out in 41 locations within the Bathurst, Oberon, Grenfell and Cowra areas as outlined below:

Locality	Apiaries	Number of hives
Recreational beekeepers		
Oberon District	5	20
Bathurst City	8	110
Bathurst Environs	7	106
Blayney Environs	1	7
SUB-TOTAL	21	243
Commercial beekeepers		
Cowra	14	1,493
Grenfell	6	1,017
SUB-TOTAL	20	2,510
TOTAL	41	2,753

Key biosecurity indicators

Biosecurity and Food Safety Compliance officers assessed the following key biosecurity indicators during on-site inspections to determine if there was a biosecurity risk present:

- Was there any evidence of disease or pests present during the brood inspection (exotic or endemic)?
- Did the weak or diseased hives pose a biosecurity risk to surrounding apiarist's hives?
- Where surrounding apiaries in a state of neglect, or were they being managed appropriately to minimise and manage a biosecurity risk?

Following inspection, apiaries were deemed as either posing or not posing a biosecurity risk.

What we found

Inspection results

Of the 41 apiaries inspected:

- **26** (58%) posed no biosecurity risk;

- **15** (42%) posed a significant biosecurity risk.

The majority of apiaries inspected were not deemed to pose a biosecurity risk due to the following reasons:

- biosecurity risks were appropriately managed;
- a management plan was already in place;
- weak hives were made bee proof and did not require intervention.

Compliance and enforcement action

The following compliance and enforcement action was taken during Operation Brass Monkey:

- One (1) interview will be conducted in relation to the unauthorised use of a registered antibiotic for animal treatment; Investigation still in progress
- Fourteen (14) written warnings will be issued in view to issuing penalty infringement notices if these breaches are detected again in the future
- Three (3) apiaries were found not to be complying with administrative requirements (noncompliance with hive identification requirements).

The following action was taken in relation to these non-compliances.

Action/Sanction issued	Number
Written warning	14
Biosecurity Direction	1
Penalty Notices	1

Strategies to manage biosecurity risk

Biosecurity and Food Safety Compliance officers proposed the following strategies to owners of the apiaries identified as posing a biosecurity risk in a bid to mitigate these risks:

- ongoing disease surveillance programs;
- regular suspect brood sample and honey tests;
- removing and culling weak hives;
- compilation of management plans with DPI's Bee Biosecurity Officer (BBO);
- disease spread mitigation, such as bee proofing affected hives.

Reasons for neglecting apiaries

Inspections revealed that the most common reasons for beekeepers to neglect their apiaries were:

- poor management practices,
- financial issues, and
- succession issues ie. the business expands, and the work becomes too overwhelming and strenuous for a single owner.

Taking remedial actions

The image below shows the remedial action of bee proofing as a hive was found dead in the apiary. Bee proofing in the field helps to eliminate the risk of robbing, minimising the potential of disease transmission.



Outcomes

Operation Brass Monkey was successful in identifying, minimising or eliminating several biosecurity risks associated with notifiable apiary diseases.

Inspections by DPI provided sufficient motivation for work to be undertaken by apiarists to satisfy the requirements of minimising a biosecurity risk. In other cases, enforcement sanctions were issued to assist in addressing biosecurity risks.

The operation raised awareness with the recreational stakeholders involved. It addressed the need to continue to mitigate biosecurity risks in relation to apiary activities. Apiarists subject to inspections now have a better understanding of their requirements in relation to the *Biosecurity Act 2015* and their general biosecurity duty.

Next steps

As part of the ongoing strategy to manage notifiable apiary disease, DPI will undertake future operations to support regular surveillance activities undertaken by the local compliance staff.

More information

For further information visit:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity>

INT18/202624

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