



NSW DEPARTMENT OF  
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

# Best practice in a honeybee pollination service

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## Introduction

Beekeepers and the beekeeping industry will benefit from adoption of best practice in pollination services. Beekeepers need to provide a proficient and professional service. This service should include an individual agreement with each grower, preferably in writing.

These guidelines are intended to help a beekeeper to tailor a professional pollination service. They are not meant as a comprehensive set of instructions for all aspects of pollination (particularly the problems caused by growers using pesticides harmful to bees).

Agreements with growers, whether written or verbal, should include any of the following points that are relevant. Stocking rates, placement of hives, payment of fees and strength of honeybee colonies will all vary according to a range of factors, including the crop species to be pollinated, physical location of crop, climatic factors, time of year, usage patterns of pesticides, competing crops and attractiveness of the crop to be pollinated.

Written contracts can protect all parties and eliminate misunderstandings between beekeeper and grower.

## Delivery/removal dates

The beekeeper will agree on a delivery date or dates set by the grower for the introduction and removal of hives from a crop, and will deliver on time. If the beekeeper cannot meet the agreed delivery or removal date, they will contact the grower at least 24 hours before the contracted date to re-negotiate a mutually agreeable delivery or removal date.



## Strength of colony

The beekeeper will only place as many supers on a brood box as can be adequately covered by the current hive population. The number of bee boxes on a hive does not necessarily indicate the strength of the colony within it.

The benefit of the colony to the grower for pollination depends on an expanding brood nest. The expanding brood nest has a high demand for pollen and nectar that stimulates the colony to actively forage on the crop to be pollinated. In most cases the ideal hive used for pollination should contain the equivalent of five to seven full-depth brood frames, 50% full of brood in all stages of development and a prolific queen and bees covering 12 frames with sufficient honey stores for the term of the pollination.

The beekeeper supplying honeybees in a paid pollination service will be prepared to demonstrate at random the strength and condition of the bee colonies to the grower or their nominated representative at any stage during the pollination service.

## Placement of hives

The grower and beekeeper will agree before the delivery on the placement of hives for the purposes of pollination of the bee hives.

Points to be considered in this agreement include:

- vehicle access;
- whether the area is subject to flooding;
- nuisance to the public and farm workers, i.e. near sheds, roadways, stock yards;
- sunlight – warm locations increase honeybee foraging times;

- shade – in spring, shade is necessary to encourage maximum activity on target crops but shade early in the season will lessen bee activity (especially in almonds).
- slope – it is preferable to place hives on flatter land;
- ground cover – it is preferable to mow the site before delivering the bees as tall plants may inhibit bee access to hives;
- sufficient area to unload the hives;
- water – bees must have access to sufficient water.

### **General points**

The beekeeper will:

- take all care not to damage trees or crop while on the growers' property;
- leave all gates as found;
- provide the grower with the beekeeper's name, address and phone number and, where possible, a second phone number (preferably a mobile phone number) in case of an emergency;
- clearly state the pollination service fee and the method and time of payment expected from the grower;
- regularly liaise with the grower and neighbouring growers regarding chemical sprays that may be applied to the target crop or neighbouring crops while the bees are on the property;

- be adequately covered by a public risk insurance policy;
- ensure that all bee hives provided for pollination are free of American Foul Brood and that all other bee diseases are controlled;
- ensure that all necessary management practices are carried out during the pollination period, e.g. swarm control and maintenance of colony vigour.

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