Code of Practice
for
Urban Beekeeping in Tasmania

Contents

Information contained in this document is provided as general advice only. For application to specific circumstances, professional advice should be sought.

This *Code of Practice* has been developed by members of the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc (TBA) . The T.B.A. has taken all reasonable steps to ensure the information contained in this Code is accurate at the time of publication. Readers should ensure that they make appropriate enquiries to determine whether new information is available on the particular subject.

Enquiries should be addressed to the T.B.A email : secretary@tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au

1. Introduction

Honey bees not only produce honey, but play a vital role in the balance of nature, especially the pollination of agricultural crops, horticultural crops and the house garden. Pollination is important for the viability of many pastoral enterprises, market gardens, orchards and seed industries. Many of our favourite foods such as apples, avocadoes, stone fruits, melons and citrus fruits are either highly dependent on, or greatly benefit from, honey bee pollination. In fact, around 65% of agricultural production in Australia depends on pollination by the European honey bee. Pollination services to Australian horticulture and agriculture were valued at $1.7 billion per annum in 1999-2000 for the 35 most important honey bee dependent crops.

Beekeeping is becoming increasingly popular in towns and cities throughout for home consumption, enjoyment in watching these highly social creatures and the opportunity to join an amateur beekeeping group. However, honey bees possess a sting and therefore require proper and responsible management so they do not create a problem for neighbours.

The purpose of this document is to form a reference and standard for the management of beekeeping in Tasmanian urban areas. Its intended uses include:

- community confidence in the safety of beekeeping activities;
- local government and regulatory bodies to establish uniform legislation;
- a standard against which any complaints can be resolved; and
- a minimum standard with which beekeepers should comply.

It is intended that this Code forms the prescription for harmonious cooperation between beekeepers and other land occupiers in Tasmania. The aim of the Code is to ensure that the keeping of honey bees does not have a negative impact on people, property, domestic animals or native flora and fauna.

This Code provides advice for the management of beehives which incorporates a standard by which beekeepers operating in Tasmania are expected to comply. As such it is to be used by apiarists, decision making authorities and the general public.

Observation of this Code and recognition of honey bee habits by apiarists and decision making authorities will enable consistent and speedy evaluation of the suitability of potential sites for apiaries. This Code provides a number of requirements which if complied with, enable beekeeping to be conducted in Tasmania without a planning permit.

Should a planning permit be required by a local authority, this Code provides a consistent approach for consideration of the application and the resolution of contentious issues. Expert apicultural personnel from Tasmania's Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) may be called upon to offer advice. Not all contingencies can be anticipated, but equitable resolution of contentious issues is considered possible by using this Code's guidelines.

If a complaint is lodged with a local council, and clearly the beekeeper is not abiding by the Code or by planning requirements in relation to an apiary (excluding crown land), council authorities will take appropriate action.

2. Definitions

Apiarist / Beekeeper -
a person keeping bees.

Apiary-
a place where honey bees are kept in hives.

Apiculture / Beekeeping-
the management of beehives.

Beehive / Hive-
modular framed housing for a honey bee colony, which normally contains either a nucleus colony or a standard size colony.

Bee sting-
injury sustained and inflicted by a honey bee worker.

Colony-
a family of bees: workers, a queen and drones

Feral bee colony-
a colony of bees which has its nest in a place other than a beehive, e.g. a hollow tree

Flight path-
the distinct route taken by many bees leaving from or returning to their hive.

Foraging bees-
bees seeking out supply of water or feed; bees naturally forage flowers for nectar and pollen supplies.

Honeycomb-
removable frames containing wax cells which house honey, pollen, and/ or brood (eggs, larvae, pupae).

Honey flow-
the gathering of nectar from flora by honey bees.

Honey extraction-
the removal of honey from combs.

Honey super-
a super which is full of honey

Pollination-
the transfer of pollen by honey bees from anthers to stigmas of flowers for the purpose of plant fertilisation.

Robber bees-
bees attempting to access stored or spilt honey, or honey in another hive.

Sticky super-
A super from which most of the honey has been extracted, and which contains honey residue

Super-
box containing frames, placed above the bottom or brood box of a hive.

Swarm-
cluster or flying mass of honey bees

3. Requirement to Register

Currently there is no requirement to register ownership of bee hives in Tasmania.

All urban beekeepers are strongly recommended to register themselves with DPIPWE. This is to allow monitoring of hive health (especially in the event of pest incursion or serious disease outbreak). Councils should consider requiring that beekeepers in their municipalities register with DPIPWE.

Registration is for a 12 month period to the end of June. The registration form can be found: http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Beekeeper%20Registration%20Form%202018_2019.doc

The annual fee is $12.00 for 1 - 4 hives or $25.00 for 5 – 10 hives. DPIPWE automatically sends out renewal forms to previously registered beekeepers.

Another benefit of registration is that the registration fee entitles the beekeeper to free testing of honey samples for American Foul Brood.

4. Applicable Legislation

In Tasmania, any beekeeping must be done in accordance with the *Animal Health (Apiaries) Regulations 2001,* under the *Animal Health Act 1995*.

Compliance with Sections 199 and 200 of the *Local Government Act 1993* is also required.

Most councils have by-laws which cover beekeeping; these are available from individual councils, and are generally not uniform; one of the intended uses of this Code is to develop uniformity across all councils in Tasmania in their by-laws governing beekeeping.

5. Industry Groups

In Tasmania, the beekeeping industry's peak body is the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc. (TBA), with a membership largely comprising commercial beekeepers. The TBA has three branches – North West, North and South and the membership of the three branches largely comprises of hobby beekeepers with a few commercial beekeepers. Urban beekeepers are strongly encouraged to join their local branches of the TBA, in order to achieve as wide an application of good beekeeping practices as possible, consistent with this Code, through communication with experienced beekeepers. Contact Details as follows-

North West: northwest_tba@live.com.au

North: vivandgraystrong@gmail.com.au

South: www.southerntasbeekeepers.org.au and Maurice.rimes@bigpond.com

6. Swarms and Bee Enquiries

Swarm enquiries from the public can be handled through individual councils, whose phone numbers can be found in the telephone directory. Also, on the TBA website www.tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au there are names and contact details of beekeepers who are available for swarm collection, by area.

Some individuals nominate a charge for this service.

Other general beekeeping enquiries can be handled through the TBA or it branches.

7. Urban Considerations

7.1 Hive Densities

One of the primary limitations to the keeping of bees is the real or perceived interaction between the bee and people who live in or use the surrounding area.

To overcome this problem a hive density limit is proposed which will minimise the potential conflict between people and the honey bee.

Allotment area	Maximum Number of Hives
up to 400 m^2	0
400-1000 m^2	2
1000-2000 m^2	5
2000-4000 m^2	10
>4000 m^2 , if urban zoned	Seek advice from TBA or one of its branches
For hives on rooftops:	Seek advice from TBA or one of its branches

At certain times of the year, e.g. when splitting hives, some additional hives should be permitted for short periods.

It should be noted that these are recommended *maximum* hive numbers; the density and configuration of surrounding dwellings will influence the actual suitable maximum number of hives on a particular block of land, particularly in relation to flight path, swarming and 'bee poo' considerations – see below for explanation of these issues.

7.2 Hive Placement & Barriers

Correct placement of hives is a most important consideration for responsible beekeeping in

urban situations. The hives must be in a quiet area of the allotment, and not within 3m of a neighbouring property, unless a solid fence or impenetrable plant barrier, not less than two metres high, forms the property boundary. Keep hives as far away as possible from roads, footpaths and parks.

Face the entrance of the hives in such a direction that bees fly across your property. If this cannot be readily be done, consider placing barriers. These can be in the form of hedges or shrubs, or instant barriers consisting of shade cloth fixed to a trellis, which may have to be up to 4m high. Bees will fly up and over these structures and should not worry neighbours.

7.3 Swarming

Swarming is a natural behaviour of honey bees and occurs chiefly in spring to early summer. Swarms should be collected when in the cluster stage to prevent them flying to nearby properties and establishing in houses, trees or similar sites, thus becoming a nuisance.

Honey bee colonies should be managed to prevent or minimise swarming. Suitable management practices are described in good beekeeping textbooks; such as *Bee Agskills*, see 'Suggested Reading' at the end of this document.

The most effective measure in the prevention of swarming is the replacement of old or failing queen bees with new ones, preferably ones with a low genetic disposition to swarm.

The splitting of a colony of honey bees into two or more units by the beekeeper will reduce its population and its likelihood to swarm. Reuniting of these units can take place at a later time in order to reduce the number of hives. This procedure is known as artificial swarming and its practice is effective in removing the swarming impulse.

Other measures such as the provision of additional supers for brood rearing and honey storage, may also reduce the swarming impulse.

7.4 Capturing and Hiving Swarms

Beekeepers should take responsibility for a swarm that has issued from one of their hives, and capture and hive it as soon as possible after it has formed into a cluster.

7.5 Feral Swarms and Colonies

Swarms issue from feral honey bee colonies periodically, and these may fly into suburban areas adjacent to native bushland or reserves.

Swarm enquiries from the public can be handled through individual councils, whose phone numbers can be found in the telephone directory. Also, on the TBA website www.tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au there are names and contact details of beekeepers that are

available for swarm collection, by area.

Beekeepers are encouraged to make themselves available, to their local council and through the TBA branches, for the collection of accessible feral swarms on both private and public land.

For established nests of bees in unwanted places, such as chimneys, destruction by pest controllers may be required, although it is recommended to consult a swarm collector first to assess the possibility of extracting the nest.

7.6 Provision of Water

Beekeepers are to provide water for their bees before locating them in their yard. Bees prefer a sunny place with capillary moisture, for example wet sand or gravel, the edge of a concrete pond, or floating water weeds. If you establish these sources, there is much less chance of bees visiting swimming pools. Remember that in very hot weather, bees use a large amount of water to maintain temperature and humidity within the hive.

7.7 Pesticides and Herbicides

The use of pesticides and herbicides is discouraged, especially if beehives are nearby.

7.8 Docile Bees

Honey bee colonies managed in urban areas should be maintained with young queens of a docile strain. Docility is one of the main selection criteria in queen bee breeding programs. Queen bees are bred by many commercial beekeepers in Tasmania, some of whom have them available for sale. Importing queen bees into Tasmania is controlled by regulations under the *Animal Health Act 1995* – http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/animal-health/bees/import-requirements-for-queen-bees-and-apiary-products

Commercial queen breeders on mainland Australia – members of the Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association – can be found at www.honeybee.com.au/aqbba. For reasons of minimising the risk of pest incursion, and obtaining bees best suited to the Tasmanian climate TBA strongly recommends sourcing new queen bees from Tasmanian beekeepers.

7.9 Robber Bees

When nectar is scarce, honey bees may rob honey from any source they can find outside their own hive. Exposure of honey (including sticky honeycombs) to honey bees in the open will encourage robbing. All spilt honey should be cleaned up immediately. To prevent robbing, buildings and caravans used for honey extraction purposes must be made bee proof, as far as practicable.

7.10 Disease Control

There are a number of honey bee diseases, especially brood diseases, of which American Foulbrood (AFB) is the most serious. Beekeepers should be cautious about mixing hive

equipment, or purchasing hives unless from known AFB free apiaries. DPIPWE offers free honey tests for AFB to registered beekeepers, and it strongly recommended that all beekeepers take up this offer, as urban beekeepers can become a source of infection for commercial apiaries.

Some bee diseases are 'notifiable', and urban beekeepers should be familiar with the Tasmanian *Animal Health Act 1995* and associated regulations.

http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/animal-health/notifiable-animal-diseases

A good information source for diseases and pests to which bees are at risk is the *Biosecurity Manual for the Honey Bee Industry,* see 'Suggested Reading' at the end of this document.

7.11 Flight Paths

Beekeepers must manage their hives to minimise the risk of interference with the general public, particularly in those areas used intensively for public access or recreation. An important element of this is the location of hives, so that the bees' flight paths to and from the hives, when on their foraging flights, are consistently at least 3m above public footpaths or recreation areas.

7.12 Robbing and Working Hives

Avoid working or robbing hives in cold, windy or wet conditions. In such conditions bees become aggressive, and the potential for trouble increases.

Beekeepers should cooperate with their neighbours when they need to work bees and ensure their neighbours are not working or relaxing outdoors at the time. Try to make hive manipulations as quick as possible so there is minimal disturbance to the bees.

Domestic animals should be kept indoors when bees are being worked, and until the bees have settled down afterwards.

A suggested useful way of removing honey supers is to use clearer boards overnight. These are available from beekeeping suppliers.

7.13 Lights

Beekeepers are to place some physical barrier between the hive entrance and neighbours' lights. On warm nights, bees are attracted to house lights, particularly fluorescent ones. If the windows are not screened, problems can occur.

7.14 'Bee Poo'

Beekeepers should be aware that bees sometimes defecate when in flight and this can have an adverse effect on neighbours' properties, e.g. windows, cars, clothes on washing lines. Where possible this problem should be mitigated by siting hives where the bees' flight paths will cause

least ‘bee poo’ problems. Keeping bees healthy and disease-free also helps reduce the problem.

8. *General Considerations*

8.1 Transportation of Hives

Beekeepers must take appropriate care when transporting hives of honey bees. All loads of hives and supers of honey must be secured in accordance with the Road Safety (Traffic) Regulations.

Beehives are not classified as dangerous goods but when transporting animals such as bees the owner has a duty of care to community members thus putting the responsibility back on the beekeeper to prevent any loss en route.

The stopping off at fuel stations or travel through built up areas with bright street lighting and traffic lights could cause loss of stock and not be in the public’s best interest. Travel routes, refuelling and breaks should be carefully planned prior to departure.

Ideally, beehives should be transported by one of the following methods:

(a) Closed entrance transport

Points about this method include:

- this method allows an owner to shift bees a short distance and unload without being stung, by blocking the hive entrance with a foam strip or similar;
- hives must be fitted with adequate ventilation so bees don't suffocate;
- bees can be shifted in a conventional station wagon vehicle as well as on a truck;
- hives can be closed at night after the bees, clustered at the entrance, are smoked and driven inside the hive; and
- shifting should be done at night when all bees are at home and when temperatures are coolest.

(b) Netted bee transport

Points about this method include:

- the use of nets allows beekeepers to move bees during daylight and dark hours, without closing the hive entrance;
- bees need to be loaded at night or dusk;
- nets should be secure enough to contain bees in transit and not flap in the breeze;
- bees can be shifted during daylight hours provided temperatures are not too high; and
- trucks should not be parked too close to bright lights, e.g. at service stations. This will lessen the likelihood of bees becoming excited, or escaping, and causing a public nuisance.

8.2 Use of Smoke in Hive Management

Smoke is used by beekeepers as a management aid to subdue honey bees when opening hives.

The use of the bee smoker is controlled by fire regulations. On days of total fire ban it is dangerous to use a smoker, and therefore best not to do so. However, if it is essential to use a smoker on a day of total fire ban then the following rules must be followed:

- light the smoker in an area devoid of combustible material;
- do not set the smoker down on combustible material whilst in use;
- do not place the smoker on neighbouring hives or in a position where it can be dislodged by wind
- extinguish the smoker completely with water when finished; and
- water (at least 5 litres) must be readily available at the site.

Smoke the entrance of hives before mowing or using weed eaters nearby. These machines, along with the smell of cut grass, upset bees, and operators or people passing by may be stung.

8.3 Protective Clothing

When opening a hive, it is strongly recommended to protect the head and face with a hat and veil, or with a bee suit. If a full-length suit is not worn, it is good practice to wear long trousers of a light colour when working bees.

8.4 Honey Sheds

Honey houses should be bee proof. The return from the field of honey supers will invariably invite robber bees until honey can be extracted. Likewise extracted, i.e. sticky supers are most attractive to robber bees and therefore should not be exposed.

Under no circumstances should sticky supers be left out in the open to be cleaned up by foraging bees. This is not only a bee disease hazard but increases the risk to community members of bee stings.

8.5 Removal of Un-managed Hives

Colonies of bees in hives need to be actively managed. If a landowner has a hive on their land which, for whatever reason, is not being actively managed by a beekeeper, it is recommended that they arrange for a registered beekeeper to remove it, or to start actively managing it on their behalf. Abandoned or neglected hives should also be reported to the DPIPWE Apiary Officer. There is a note on DPIPWE website regarding this, which can be found:

http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/animal-health/bees

9. Acknowledgements

This *Code of Practice* has been prepared by the TBA in consultation with DPIPWE.

The contribution of individuals representing their groups is gratefully acknowledged.

The sourcing of material from the Queensland's *Code of Practice for Urban Beekeeping,* published by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries, and the Victoria's *Apiary Code of Practice,* published by the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, is also acknowledged.

10. Suggested Reading

- *Tasmanian Animal Health Act 1995, and associated regulations*
- *Beekeeping in Tasmania* Dept. of Primary Industry, 1991 (being re-published as at 2014)
- *Bee Agskills* NSW Dept.of Primary Industries, 2007.
- *Biosecurity Manual for the Honey Bee Industry* Plant Health Australia, 2012
- *The Bee Book: Beekeeping in Australia* Peter Warhurst and Roger Goebel, Queensland Dept. of Primary Industries & Fisheries