POLLINATION IN AUSTRALIA

HONEYBEES, an introduced pollinator in Australia, are essential for pollination of many of our commercial crops. However, we should not forget the role that other pollinators play. These include native bees, birds and mammals, even other insects such as ants, thrips and beetles. We need to diversify and preserve all of these.

In the northern Hemisphere, BUMBLEBEES are also a key pollinator in many crops and native plant communities. Alarming declines of both honeybees and native bees, which include many species of bumblebees, have been recorded, and programs launched to reverse this trend. A single species of bumblebee, the northern hemisphere temperate species Bombus terrestris, has been present in New Zealand for 150 years and in Tasmania for 16 years. Bumblebees have been commercially available in a managed hive system for 20 years for pollination of crops, including in New Zealand. They are particularly useful for greenhouse tomatoes, which require buzz pollination. Access is critical for the expansion and modernisation of the greenhouse tomato industry in Australia, worth AU$540 million/annum. The Australian Hydroponic and Greenhouse Association is awaiting a decision from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on whether bumblebees can be imported live into mainland Australia.

Commercial hive housing a bumblebee colony

Bumblebee visiting a tomato flower

FACT BUMBLEBEES HAVE BEEN THE TARGET OF MISINFORMATION IN AUSTRALIA

FACT Bumblebees do not spread either Varroa mite or Braula fly. This is a rumour perpetuated by opponents to bumblebee introduction to keep honeybee producers offside.

FACT Bumblebees have very few parasites and predators common to honeybees, and all can be screened for and removed in commercial production.

FACT Bombus terrestris is a temperate species. Tasmania and New Zealand suit it - mainland Australia has few climatically suitable areas, greatly limiting their potential for establishment and spread.

FACT Bumblebees coexist with honeybees and native bees in their natural range - they are not viewed as competitors.

FACT Bumblebees are not a threat to native parrots, native plants or native bees - this is based only on unsupported speculation.

FACT Bumblebees are highly valued pollinators and are not aggressive by nature.

FACT Claims that bumblebees present a potential threat to increased spread of weeds on mainland Australia are not supported by facts. Honeybees are the main insect pollinator of weeds.

FACT Bumblebees are not the only buzz pollinators of solanaceous weeds - there are many buzz-pollinating native bee species already in Australia.

FACT There is no proposal, nor intent, to release bumblebees across Australia. The proposal is to import secure hives, likely from Tasmania, which are used only in closed screened greenhouses, and which are destroyed after use.

FACT The exotic leafcutter bee has been imported from Canada in large numbers for many years for release in South Australia. No problems have arisen.

FACT The major threat to honeybees and other pollinators is land clearing, habitat destruction and pesticides. It is not bumblebees.

FACT The finger for colony collapse disorder is increasingly being pointed at newer pesticides such as neonicotinoids. Did you know that bumblebees and other bees are also suffering huge declines? Did you know that Germany and France have banned use of some of these pesticides? What is Australia doing?

FACT BUMBLEBEES ARE HIGHLY DESIRABLE POLLINATORS AND POSE NO THREAT TO AUSTRALIA

FACT Bumblebees are used in managed hive systems for pollination of almonds, apples, kiwifruit, tomatoes, capsicum, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, eggplant, blueberries, cranberries, beans, zucchini, stone fruit and avocadoes. They supplement honeybees, and do not replace them.

FACT Bumblebees will increase returns to the tomato sector by $40 million per year immediately.

FACT Bumblebee use will require that most pesticides are discarded in favour of biological pest control, leading to greater food safety and a safer work environment.

FACT Bumblebees will allow the greenhouse industry to be competitive and lead to greatly increased investment and expansion, resulting in a much smaller environmental footprint for food production in Australia.

AHGA

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