



Australian Government
Rural Industries Research and
Development Corporation



Know-how for Horticulture™

Media Release

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New body to be formed to assure pollination of crops

A new cross-industry alliance will be formed to guide the establishment of a commercial pollination industry to help protect the honeybee industry and ensure continued pollination of important food crops in Australia.

Pollination Australia is an alliance of the honeybee industry and a number of horticultural and plant-based industries that are dependent on pollination.

The development of the alliance received funding support from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL).

Pollination is critical for dozens of horticultural crops, and is also important for pastures, fodder and some broad acre crops. The estimated cost to Australia from a loss of honeybee pollination services is conservatively estimated to be \$1.7 billion.

However pollination services to pollination-dependent industries are threatened by the potential incursion of the honeybee parasite, *Varroa destructor* which could wipe out feral populations of honeybees and significantly harm commercial hives, with flow on effects to pollination of valuable crops. Australia is currently one of the last remaining honey producing countries in the world free of the *Varroa* mite.

RIRDC's General Manager, Established Rural Industries, Margie Thomson, said Pollination Australia would provide the framework to build a commercial pollination industry in Australia.

"Pollination services – where honeybee hives are trucked to crops to provide pollination – are not well developed in this country, with only a proportion of hives dedicated to pollination.

"A commercial industry will help ensure that important crops, particularly in the horticulture industry, continue to be pollinated in the event of a devastating pest outbreak in the Australian honeybee industry," Ms Thomson said.

"Pollination Australia will also help the honeybee and horticultural industries prepare for a possible *varroa* incursion, attempt to prevent it occurring and learn to manage it, if and when it does occur."

HAL's General Manager, Industry Services, Warwick Scherf said this was an important step in protecting these multi-billion dollar plant-based industries into the future.

"The industries involved will now need to meet to formalise the Pollination Australia arrangements, at which point RIRDC and HAL will step back from the process.

"However RIRDC and HAL will remain vital players through the provision of research and development to assist with the establishment of a commercial pollination industry," Mr Scherf said.

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