

# Code of Practice for Urban Beekeeping in Tasmania



# Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Definitions	3
3. Requirement to register	4
4. Applicable legislation	4
5. Industry groups	4
6. Swarms and bee enquiries	4
7. Urban considerations	5
7.1 Hive densities	5
7.2 Hive placement & barriers	5
7.3 Swarming	5
7.4 Capturing and hiving swarm	6
7.5 Feral swarms and colonies	6
7.6 Provision of water	6
7.7 Pesticides & herbicides	7
7.8 Docile bees	7
7.9 Robber bees	7
7.10 Disease control	7
7.11 Flight paths	7
7.12 Robbing and working hives	8
7.13 Lights	8
8. General Considerations	8
8.1 Transportation of hives	8
8.2 Use of smoke	9
8.3 Protective clothing	9
8.4 Honey Sheds	9
9. Acknowledgements	10
10. Suggested reading	10

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 subject.

Enquiries should be addressed to the T.B.A email: [secretary@tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au](mailto: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, avocados, 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.

Backyard beekeeping is becoming increasingly popular for home honey consumption, the enjoyment of watching these highly social creatures and the opportunity to join an amateur beekeeping group. However, there are risks associated with keeping honey bees and so if deciding to keep bees in an urban setting, proper and responsible management is required, 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 the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) Tasmania 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 it is evident that 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

<p><b>Apiarist / Beekeeper -</b> a person keeping bees.</p> <p><b>Apiary-</b> a place where honey bees are kept in hives.</p> <p><b>Apiculture / Beekeeping-</b> the management of beehives.</p> <p><b>Beehive / Hive-</b> modular framed housing for a honey bee colony, which normally contains either a nucleus colony or a standard size colony.</p> <p><b>Bee sting-</b> injury sustained and inflicted by a honey bee worker.</p> <p><b>Colony-</b> a family of bees: workers, a queen and drones</p> <p><b>Feral bee colony-</b> a colony of bees which has its nest in a place other than a beehive, e.g. a hollow tree</p> <p><b>Flight path-</b> the distinct route taken by many bees leaving from or returning to their hive.</p> <p><b>Foraging bees-</b> bees seeking out supply of water or feed; bees naturally forage flowers for nectar and pollen supplies.</p>	<p><b>Honeycomb-</b> removable frames containing wax cells which house honey, pollen, and/ or brood (eggs, larvae, pupae).</p> <p><b>Honey flow-</b> the gathering of nectar from flora by honey bees.</p> <p><b>Honey extraction-</b> the removal of honey from combs.</p> <p><b>Honey super-</b> a super which is full of honey</p> <p><b>Pollination-</b> the transfer of pollen by honey bees from anthers to stigmas of flowers for the purpose of plant fertilisation.</p> <p><b>Robber bees-</b> bees attempting to access stored or spilt honey, or honey in another hive.</p> <p><b>Sticky super-</b> A super from which most of the honey has been extracted, and which contains honey residue</p> <p><b>Super-</b> box containing frames, placed above the bottom or brood box of a hive.</p> <p><b>Swarm-</b> cluster or flying mass of honey bees</p>
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### 3. Requirement to Register

Under the *Biosecurity Act 2019* (the Act), beekeeping is considered to be a regulated dealing. Under Section 77 of the Act, a person must not engage in a regulated dealing unless:

- (a) the person is a registered entity; and
- (b) the person's biosecurity registration authorises the person to engage in the regulated dealing; and
- (c) the dealing is in accordance with the person's biosecurity registration.

Therefore, all beekeepers in Tasmania (both recreational and commercial) must be registered. All beekeepers must also comply with conditions of registration, including the requirement to adhere to the Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice.

Unregistered beekeeping is an offence under Section 77 of the Act and penalties may apply. The maximum penalty: in the case of (a) a body corporate, a fine not exceeding 2 500 penalty units; or (b) an individual, a fine not exceeding 500 penalty units.

To register, visit the NRE Tasmania website.

### 4. Applicable Legislation

In Tasmania, any beekeeping activities must be done in accordance with the *Biosecurity Act 2019* (the Act).

Some local councils have by-laws regarding beekeeping, which can be sourced from the individual council. The by-laws generally differ from council to council, however, one of the intended uses of this Code is to provide a standard for which all councils in Tasmania may apply to their beekeeping by-laws.

### 5. Industry Groups

In Tasmania, the beekeeping industry's peak body is the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association Inc. (TBA), with a membership base largely comprised of commercial beekeepers. The TBA has three branches – North West, North and Commercial Beekeepers Southern Tasmania Association. The membership of the three branches is largely comprised of hobby beekeepers, with a few commercial beekeepers. Urban beekeepers are strongly encouraged to join their local branch of the TBA, or the Southern Beekeepers Association in order to achieve as wide an application of good beekeeping practices as possible, consistent with this Code, the applicable legislation and adherence to the Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice.

Contact Details are as follows-

North West: [northwest\\_tba@live.com.au](mailto:northwest_tba@live.com.au)

North: [secretarynorthernbranchtba@gmail.com](mailto:secretarynorthernbranchtba@gmail.com)

South: [www.southerntasbeekeepers.org.au](http://www.southerntasbeekeepers.org.au)

## 6. Bee Enquiries

General beekeeping enquiries can be handled through the TBA or its associated branches.

Apiary-related biosecurity concerns can be handled through Tasmania's Apiary Officer with the Department of NRE Tasmania.

## 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.

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Allotment area	Maximum Number of Hives
up to 400 m <sup>2</sup>	0
400-1000 m <sup>2</sup>	2
1000-2000 m <sup>2</sup>	5
2000-4000 m <sup>2</sup>	10
>4000 m <sup>2</sup> , if urban zoned	Seek advice from SBA

For hives on rooftops:                      Seek advice from SBA

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 should be in a quiet area of the allotment, and not within 3m of a neighbouring property, unless a solid fence or impenetrable plant barrier, no less than two metres high, forms the property boundary. Keep hives as far away as possible from roads, foot paths 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.

#### **7.3.1 Reducing the likelihood of swarming**

Honey bee colonies should be managed to prevent or minimise swarming. Suitable management practices are described in good beekeeping textbooks such as *Bee Agskills*. For more resources, 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.

#### **7.3.2 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.

#### **7.3.3 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.

For established nests of bees in unwanted places, such as chimneys, destruction by pest controllers is recommended, although it is usually worth consulting a swarm collector first to



assess the possibility of extracting the nest.

#### **7.3.4 Swarm enquiries**

Swarm enquiries from the public can be handled through individual councils, whose phone numbers can be found in the telephone directory. On the TBA website [www.tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au](http://www.tasmanianbeekeepers.org.au) are the names and contact details of beekeepers who are available for swarm collection, by area. Some individuals nominate a charge for this service.

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

#### **7.4 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.

#### **7.5 Pesticides and Herbicides**

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

#### **7.6 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 commercial beekeepers in Tasmania, many of whom have them available for sale. The most up-to-date information on the rules and regulations of importation of queen bees into Tasmania can be found on the NRE Tasmania webpage. Commercial queen breeders on mainland Australia, members of the Australian Queen Bee Breeders Association, can be found at [www.honeybee.com.au/aqbbba](http://www.honeybee.com.au/aqbbba).

#### **7.7 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 not only encourage robbing, but is a biosecurity risk. All spilt honey and comb 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.

#### **7.8 Pest and Disease Control**

There are a number of pests and diseases seriously affecting honey bees that all beekeepers must be aware of. To ensure that both recreational and commercial beekeepers in Tasmania have a knowledge of bee pests and diseases, completion of the Biosecurity for Beekeepers

Online Learning Course through Plant Health Australia (PHA) is a condition of registration. This training goes through the Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice (the Code), which is a national guideline that was developed in consultation with beekeepers and government to provide a clear framework for Australian beekeepers to engage in best-practice biosecurity.

Some pests and diseases are considered notifiable, which means they must be reported to the state Apiary Officer. It is a beekeeper's responsibility to know which pests and diseases are notifiable.

More information on apiary pests and diseases can be found on the BeeAware website.

## **7.9 Flight Paths**

Beekeepers must manage their hives to minimise the risk of interference with the 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.

## **7.10 Working Hives**

Avoid working or robbing hives of honey 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.

## **7.11 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.

## **7.12 'Bee Poo'**

Beekeepers should be aware that bees sometimes defecate when in flight and this can have an adverse effect on neighbours' property i.e. windows, cars, clothes on washing lines. Where possible, this problem should be mitigated by placing hives where the bees' flight paths will cause the least amount of 'bee poo' problems. Keeping bees healthy and disease-free also

helps reduce the problem of extreme defecation.

## **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 biosecurity risk, 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. Allowing hives to become exposed or neglected is an offence. If a member of the public spots a hive in disrepair, they should contact the state Apiary Officer immediately as neglected hives are a major pathway for the spread of pests and diseases.

## **9. Acknowledgements**

This *Code of Practice* has been prepared by the SBA in consultation with NRE Tasmania.

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

- *The Biosecurity Act 2019*
- *BeeAware Website*
- *The Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice 2022*
- *Bee Agskills* NSW Dept.of Primary Industries, 2007.
- *Biosecurity Manual for Beekeepers, 2022*
- *The Bee Book: Beekeeping in Australia* Peter Warhurst and Roger Goebel, Queensland Dept. of Primary Industries & Fisheries