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NATIONAL BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION of NEW ZEALAND (INC.)

PRESIDENT:
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James Ward and Mary-Anne Thomason
Kintail Honey and The Bee Business
Dudley Road, R D 6
Inglewood

Dear James and Mary-Anne

Thank you for your letter about the ballot for support for the Commodity Levies application. I hope I can reassure you on a few points, and at least clarify the process we followed in conducting the ballot.

First let me ensure we are speaking about the same 'pieces of paper'. What I will call the voting paper is the yellow paper that you actually send in to vote. The 'statutory statements' is the sheet with 17 numbered statements. Finally, there is everything else - the magazine and the insert titled 'Yes or No?'

The intent of the NBA has been that every person who has a beehive (notice I didn't even say 'beekeeper', as that implies they are doing something with it!) should be considered as a potential levy payer. For a variety of reasons, both practical (the difficulties of collecting small amounts of levy) and fairness (if someone really is just a *true* hobbyist, we felt no levy should be paid) we agreed to exempt anyone with 10 hives or fewer on 3 or fewer sites.

But when we tried to say this in the context of the Commodity Levies Act, we were pulled up by MAF Policy, who insisted that we must, because the Act says so, deal in the concept of 'a commodity'. We tried to have 'hives' and 'apiaries' as the commodity, but their legal section would not even consider it. So we were forced to list all of the various 'commodities' that can be produced by a beehive. Again, we tried to include pollination services (no, that isn't a commodity) and queen bees (no, those are creatures or livestock, not a commodity). And we also wanted to have bulk bees/package bees listed in the list as well, but again we were told that would not be possible.

There is no loophole, however. *Every beehive in New Zealand produces one or more (all, in fact...) of each of the commodities listed. It doesn't matter whether the beekeeper ever collects/takes/extracts it from the hive - every beehive counts!* So we have done the best we can to eliminate the loophole that is in the Hive Levy Act (where the definition of a beekeeper is given as someone who is in the business of producing honey for sale). I spoke at some length to the Fruitgrowers' Federation, who had a similar problem. They wanted to ensure that just because someone didn't pick the fruit in any given year the person wouldn't be able to dodge their levy.

So we have it on record with MAF Policy that it doesn't matter if the 'commodities' that we listed are ever gathered or sold - the hives would still be producers of the commodity.

The promotional material (the 'Yes or No?' insert) was prepared with the specific intention of convincing the 10-50 hive beekeeper of the reasons they would want to support the NBA and its activities. The 50 to 17,000 hive beekeepers would have received a lot more material (in the NZ

Beekeeper, field days, Conference) about the levy proposal. We were most concerned that the smaller number of hiveholding outfits were convinced.

I won't make any bones about it - I personally wanted this ballot to succeed. I believed that our most vulnerable group to convince of the value of the NBA was this 10-50 hive group, and made sure that we did all we could to convince them in particular (for instance, read John Heinemann's Hobbyist Notes).

So yes, the people who were used in the promotional brochure was slanted at the smaller hive holdings. On a more extreme note, I had a guy ring me a week or so ago who was irate that the NBA had not given money to either him or Stephen Lee to explain why people should vote 'No', why the NBA was a non-democratic and useless organisation!

But I do agree with you re: people in the middle who have 1000, 2000, 3000, 5000 hives. And I most certainly hope they *have* read all of the material over the last few years carefully to make sure they know how the Commodity Levies order will affect them. No one has ever tried to hide anything on this proposed levy. There has never been any hidden agendas or secret plans. Any time any beekeeper has approached the NBA, full and frank information has been provided to try to help people understand what is expected to happen.

Rushed? We had the ballot papers printed, and a group of people hired to stuff the envelopes for the first week on June back in 1991! And each time we have gotten close to the ballot since, there has always been one or another thing that has caused its delay or postponement. So during the last 5 years the Executive(s) have continued to make sure that what was being presented was as close to what was intended as we could (given the limitation of working with lawyers and MAF Policy!). I do think we have done a fairly good job on this. I do think the levy system that has been developed and debated by the industry over the last 5 years is both a good one, and one that people have had an opportunity to comment upon on a variety of occasions. And the fact that 72% of the apiaries represented by the returned ballots voted Yes makes me think it *does* have industry support.

I do appreciate your comments of support for the Pest Management Strategy. I would suggest we have an *awful* lot of details and concerns to work through with that, perhaps even more than with this levy that simply raises the money to pay for it all. If you ever have *any* questions about what is happening, or how something might operate (or you hear other beekeepers talking about it) contact me and I will be happy to try to find some answers. The PMS, in particular, is far too important for people to just stand back from and hope it will all happen OK; we each need to participate in its development and implementation plans.

Again, thank you for writing. I hope you don't mind that I will be providing your letter to the rest of the NBA Executive, even though it was addressed to me, as I believe you have raised matters and concerns that all of the Executive should be aware of.

Yours sincerely

Nick Wallingford
NBA President