



## **PRESS RELEASE**

28<sup>th</sup> October 2008

The Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association (AHGA) questions the Australian Federal Government support of Australian farmers and consumers following a decision by the Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, to reject an application to allow the import of bumblebees onto mainland Australia.

This decision costs Australian greenhouse farmers at least \$40 million annually that must be passed on to consumers and seriously restricts investment into an industry that delivers a minimum 80% saving of water (compared to traditional farming activities).

Australia is one of the few countries in the world without access, and this puts us at an increasingly severe disadvantage in a free market economy. It has delayed the expansion of the industry in Australia by several years, and inhibited foreign and local investment. This technology is sophisticated and proven, and is used by all of Australia's major competitors, including New Zealand. This is a major concern to the Australian greenhouse industry.

Where is the incentive Minister, to encourage the modern face of horticulture in a country that increasingly views water as a precious commodity, yet penalises greenhouse growers that deliver water use efficiencies and small environmental footprints compared with other food producing industries with considerable higher yield per unit area?

The bumblebee has been used safely in over 40 countries since the late 80's to pollinate greenhouse crops with negligible effects on their flora or fauna. In Europe alone last year, there was over 2 million hives produced for this purpose. Bumblebees provide a strong incentive for reduced pesticide use through the adoption of bio-control, a feature in on-farm food safety programs worldwide.'

New Zealand has been successfully rearing and using bumblebees for many years, with no negative effects identified. These facts are entirely at odds with claims by Australian opposition groups that "all hell will break loose" if bumblebees are allowed to leave Tasmania for the mainland, and that their impact has been "devastating" in Tasmania. There is no evidence to substantiate this doom and gloom scenario. Bumblebees will not change their benign character when they reach the mainland.

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If they are so bad and disruptive, why has there been no concerted attempt to control bumblebees that have been in Tasmania since the early 90's?

12 years of intense research provides for sound scientific rebuttals for the reasons given by the Minister, therefore we can only assume that this is a political decision and has the capacity to be Labor's "orange-bellied parrot" episode.

The many factual errors contained in the Minister's Press Release suggests that the considerable scientific documentation provided in the AHGA submission was ignored. Why?

We seriously question government's capacity to deal with climate change and the interests of Australian farmers and consumers if they dismiss scientific evidence in making decision's.

The AHGA calls on Minister Garrett to reconsider this devastating decision and show support to an industry that is environmentally sound and responsible and accounts for around 30% of all Australian vegetable farmers.

(p.s. Since when has Tasmania not been considered part of Australia?)

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