

PIRSA

Recreational Beekeeping

A guide to beekeeping in South Australia



Recreational beekeeping - a guide to beekeeping in South Australia

Information current as of 23 July 2020
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All Enquiries

Michael Stedman
Biosecurity SA - Apiary Unit
Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA)
33 Flemington St, Glenside SA 5065
GPO Box 1671, Adelaide SA 5001
T 08 8429 0872 M 0408 812 698
E michael.stedman@sa.gov.au

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Keeping honeybees is becoming an increasingly popular hobby in Australia. Honeybees play a vital role in our economy, producing products such as honey and wax. Their most important contribution is in pollinating a significant proportion of our agricultural and horticultural crops.

Before you get any honeybees, you must consider the regulatory requirements, your ability and commitment, and the impact they can have on your neighbours. Not everyone appreciates honeybees in their backyard, and for a percentage of the population a honeybee sting can be fatal. This guide will take you through the responsibilities and requirements of keeping honeybees. Each section includes a checklist with key actions.

Industry best practice and legislation

Honeybees contribute around \$1.7 billion worth of agricultural and horticultural pollination services in South Australia. Protecting them from pests and diseases is essential for the economy. If you are considering keeping honeybees, understand your responsibilities before making a decision.

Legislative requirements and industry best practices that govern and guide the keeping of honeybees include:

- *Livestock Act 1997* (SA)
- Local council by-laws
- Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice
- South Australian Code of Practice for Apiculture Management.

The *Livestock Act 1997* (SA) specifically covers honeybees of the genera *Apis* (including the European Honey Bee, *Apis mellifera*) and *Megachile* (including the Leafcutter Bee, *Megachile rotundata*). Other regulatory requirements regarding the keeping of honeybees include council by-laws, while regulatory requirements regarding the production and sale of consumable bee products include the *Food Act 2001* (SA).

The introduction and keeping of exotic bee species (including the Asian Honey Bee, *Apis cerana*, and Bumblebees) is prohibited. While the keeping

of Australian native bee species is not legislated under the *Livestock Act 1997* (SA), other regulations prohibit the damage or removal of plant material and soil (the nesting media for most native bees) from designated areas (including parks and reserves), and their introduction into South Australia.

Know your responsibilities

Keeping honeybees requires a commitment that should not be taken lightly. Legislative requirements and best practices that must be complied with include:

- registration
- hive placement
- hive manipulations and management
- honeybee pest and disease identification, notification, control and prevention
- sting prevention and first aid
- nuisance prevention
- honey processing.

Actions:

Before you decide to keep honeybees

- ❑ Decide whether you can commit to the necessary requirements of keeping honeybees (including the physical requirements)
- ❑ Determine whether you, members of your household, and any persons assisting with beekeeping are allergic to honeybee stings, and have taken steps to address the risks
- ❑ Make yourself aware of the legislative requirements regarding keeping honeybees.

Preparing for keeping honeybees

- ❑ At the time of registration, read and understand the provided information on notifiable honeybee pests and diseases
- ❑ If you are keeping more than 50 hives, within the first 12 months of registration complete an approved course in bee pest and disease management.

Local council requirements

In addition to legislation regarding nuisance honeybees and the food safety of honeybee products sold for food, local councils may have requirements, including by-laws, regarding the keeping of honeybees.

Honeybees must not cause a nuisance, including interfering with the use or enjoyment of an area such as another person's property. If your honeybees are deemed to be a nuisance, the council can order their removal.

Some local councils have by-laws regarding beekeeping, including:

- preventing beekeeping in certain council areas (even if registered with PIRSA)
- restricting the number of hives permitted per property
- limiting the distance hives can be kept from boundaries.

Actions:

- ❑ Check your local council by-laws prior to making the decision to keep honeybees.

Registration of hives

Under the *Livestock Act 1997* (SA), you must register your hives with PIRSA. Registration is required regardless of the number, hive type, location or reason for keeping honeybees.

Actions:

- ❑ Register with PIRSA by completing and submitting a Beekeeper Registration and Hive Identification Code Form before acquiring your honeybees
- ❑ Identify each of your hives with your allocated three letter Hive Identification Code (HIC) on the outside front face of the bottom box in characters at least 30 mm high
- ❑ In addition to identifying each hive, identify each swarm catch box accessible to honeybees not at your place of residence with your name and phone number on an outside front face/lid of the swarm catch box in characters at least 25 mm high.

Hive management

Managing your honeybees requires time and commitment.

Hive density and location

Unless stricter council by-laws apply, the number of hives per property is limited based on land size, see the table below for details.

Hives per property	
Land size	Max number of hives allowed
450 m ² or less	2
451-1,000 m ²	3
1,001-2,000 m ²	4

When deciding the location of your hives, be sure you choose an area where your neighbours are not going to be stung by hive-defending honeybees. Unless stricter council by-laws apply, keep hives at least 20 m from all boundaries, or behind solid boundary barriers at least 2.1 m high such that honeybees exit the property above head height.

Actions:

- ❑ Ensure hive numbers and locations are appropriate for your capabilities and the size of your property.

Use Chief Inspector approved hives only

While there is a range of hive types and styles, each with advantages and limitations, honeybees must be kept in Chief Inspector approved hives.

The requirements outlined by the Chief Inspector state that hives must be:

- specifically designed, constructed, operated and maintained to be bee-proof, with honeybee access restricted to specifically designed, constructed and maintained hive entrances
- specifically designed, constructed, operated and maintained so as to have easily removable frames; including being fitted with sufficient frames of the required type and size, with frames to comprise of a minimum of a continuous straight strip of foundation extending to within 10 mm of each end bar, and downwards at least 20 mm
- identified externally on each hive in which honeybees are kept with their registered HIC.



Langstroth type hives are recommended for beginner apiarists. These hives have sufficient moveable frames (each containing a top bar, two end bars, a bottom bar and a full-size sheet of foundation). Shown are two hives from different manufacturers, each comprising of 2x 10 frame full-depth Langstroth boxes. The external hive components (hive boxes and lids) are set back to show internal hive components (including frames, queen excluders, and under-lid mats). A frame of the type described with a full sheet of black plastic foundation is also shown on the lid of the left-hand hive.

Note the condition of the hives; when the external hive components are aligned, the hives will be bee-proof except for access via hive entrances. **Photo courtesy of Adelaide Beekeeping Supplies.**

Actions:

- ❑ Understand the advantages/limitations of the hive type/style you intend keeping
- ❑ Ensure your hives are Chief Inspector approved (requirements can be found on the PIRSA website).

Acquiring honeybees and used hive components

If you place out swarm catch boxes (or if they are accessible to honeybees), they must be Chief Inspector approved hives, and free from notifiable conditions. Additionally, they must not contain comb, honey, pollen, or dead bees, and frames must only contain undrawn foundation.

You must notify PIRSA when acquiring and/or disposing of hives and used hive components via the Change of Ownership/Address Form.

Actions:

- ❑ Acquire hives and hive components (both new and used) from reputable suppliers
- ❑ Prior to purchasing, determine the pest and disease status of hives and used hive components
- ❑ Sterilise used hive components prior to use by using an approved method
- ❑ Isolate purchased hives and caught swarms from other hives until satisfied they are free from notifiable conditions
- ❑ Notify PIRSA of your acquisitions using the Change of Ownership/Address Form.

Set up a water supply

Honeybees must have access to water at all times. The water supply must be of sufficient volume and suitable quality, and located on your property no more than 200 m from your hives. A large container that can be topped up regularly is recommended. Excluding evaporation, one hive can consume 4 L of water on a hot day, so select a large container (e.g. one that has sufficient volume to only need filling weekly, and can keep the water cool).

When setting up your water supply you should ensure the container:

- is placed in the shade



Appropriate hive density and placement are important. These hives are exposed to the winter sun yet are shaded in summer. The back shed and the side fence and vegetation forces honeybees to exit the property above head height, minimising annoyance to neighbours. The bath containing water plants provides sufficient volume to keep the water cool and provide a continuous supply. The water plants provide shade and allow honeybees to land and water without drowning. Both hives are branded with their registered HIC, and differ in size commensurate with their strength, with the left-hand hive comprising three boxes and a large entrance, while the right-hand hive comprises of one box and has a much reduced entrance. **Photo courtesy of Hayes Honey**

- is secure and cannot be accessed/dislodged by pets or small children
- allows honeybee landing platform access regardless of water level (e.g. using shade cloth extending from the top to the bottom of the container, or floats sitting on the water surface).

Actions:

- ❑ Ensure sufficient and suitable water is located on your property
- ❑ Ensure the water supply is accessible to honeybees at all times.

Manage and inspect hives regularly

You must tend to and inspect your hives, and all related products and property regularly. You should always carry this out in a way that:

- complies with legislation and relevant codes
- does not result in the spread of notifiable conditions (e.g. pests and disease), exposure or neglect
- prevents exposure and access by honeybees
- prevents honeybees becoming a nuisance, including by swarming, and defensively stinging neighbours when you inspect hives.

The following table provides recommended frequencies for inspecting your hives each season.

Recommended hive inspections	
Season	Inspection frequency
Swarming season	Fortnightly
Summer	Monthly
Autumn	1-2 Monthly
Winter	1-2 Monthly

Storing bee products and hive components

Any bee products or hive components that are removed from a hive, must be stored in a bee-proof manner (e.g. in sealed containers/bee-proof shed). If any products or hive components are not able to be stored, reused, processed or sold, they must be destroyed using an approved method (e.g. burning them completely in a hole and deep-burying the residue).

Actions:

- ❑ Ensure you understand your responsibilities with regard to hive management, and the identification, notification and management of notifiable conditions
- ❑ Inspect and manage hives, hive components, honeybee products, and honeybee-related

property to prevent the spread of notifiable conditions, and to prevent exposure, neglect and nuisance.

Keep Biosecurity Records

You must record all honeybee biosecurity related management practices. This includes:

- hive inspections for notifiable conditions
- the detection, identification, notification, isolation, sterilisation, and eradication of notifiable conditions
- moving hives and swarm catch boxes within SA (and into/out of SA)
- acquiring honeybees, products and/or used property not originating from your own hives
- disposal of honeybees, products and/or used property
- chemical treatments applied to honeybees, products and/or property
- acknowledgment of any Chief Inspector approved information on notifiable conditions
- annual honey testing for American Foul Brood (if keeping 20 or more hives)
- completing an approved course in honeybee pest and disease management (if keeping 50 or more hives).

Actions:

- ❑ Ensure you understand and comply with the requirements for keeping records of all biosecurity related management practices.

Sale of honeybee products for food

Any honeybee products for food that are sold (including by bartering, offering or attempting to sell, offering as a prize or reward, giving away, etc.), must be safe and suitable, and comply with relevant food standards and consumer legislation including the:

- *Food Act 2001* (SA), which includes requirements in the Food Standards Code, and by local councils
- *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth)
- *National Measurement Act 1960* (Cth).

Food Standards Code

Specifically:

Chapter 1

- Part 1.2 Labelling and other requirements (including legibility and size of characters; covering food identification, lot identification, name and address of supplier, warning statements, statement of ingredients, date marking, directions for use and storage, and nutritional information)
- Part 1.4 Contaminants and residues.

Chapter 2

- Standard 2.8.2 - Honey.

Chapter 3

- Standard 3.2.2 Food safety practices and general requirements
- Standard 3.2.3 Food premise and equipment.

Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth)

Specifically:

- Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard (2016) (including wording, position, legibility, use of logo and standard marks, and size of characters).

National Measurement Act 1960 (Cth)

Specifically:

- labelling (including position, legibility, and size of characters) covering units of measure (grams/kilograms), and name and address of packer/supplier
- using appropriate approved measuring instruments
- meeting specified product shortfall tolerances.

Local Government

- you must also notify the local council(s) where you operate.

Actions:

- ❑ Prior to selling honey, notify your local council(s) where you operate

- ❑ Understand the relevant requirements of the *Food Act 2001* (SA), the Food Standards Code, the *National Measurement Act* (Cth), and the Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard (2016).

If you no longer wish to keep honeybees

It is an offence to neglect or abandon honeybees, and any honeybees in your possession must be registered, and kept to prevent the spread of notifiable conditions, and prevent exposure, neglect and nuisance.

If you no longer wish to keep honeybees, you must dispose of them. This may include selling them, or storing them (e.g. hives if virtually dead or dead, or hive components if damaged/non-compliant. They must be stored in a bee-proof manner (see **Storing bee products and hive components**). If not able to be reused or sold, they must be destroyed using an approved method (see **Storing bee products and hive components**).

Actions:

- ❑ Notify PIRSA if disposing of one or more hives (including by bartering, selling, giving away) but retaining others, via a Change of Ownership/Address Form
- ❑ Notify PIRSA and cancel registration if disposing of all hives (including by bartering, selling, giving away, and/or destroying them) via a Change of Ownership/Address Form.

How you can help without owning honeybees

The honeybee population in Australia is not experiencing the losses that other countries have seen; but, with such an important role in the pollination process, a little help can go a long way. If you are not really prepared or able to meet the requirements necessary to keep honeybees, there are still plenty of things you can do to assist all pollinators, including honeybees and native bees.

Do

- purchase honey and bee pollinated agricultural and horticultural produce that are produced and packed in Australia
- provide suitable nesting sites for native bees and other pollinators
- use pollinator-safe pesticides and pest control practices
- plant a range of pollinator-beneficial native vegetation
- provide a continuous supply of sufficient, shaded water (with landing platforms) for pollinators to drink from
- host a honeybee hive belonging to a competent registered apiarist.

Don't

- put out honeybee products (including honey and honey/water) as feed, including for honeybees or birds
- import any type of bees, bee products or beekeeping equipment from overseas without obtaining appropriate permits from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- take honeybees, honeybee products or honeybee related property between Australian states and territories without obtaining appropriate authorisation from the state/territory Department of Agriculture
- take honeybees, honeybee products or honeybee equipment to Kangaroo Island.

Further information

Beekeeping Groups

For detailed information on beekeeping as well as courses and supplies:

- Beekeepers' Society of South Australia (BSSA): bees.org.au
- South Australian Apiarists' Association (SAAA): saaa.org.au or ring 0419 982 102

Legislation

All South Australian legislation can be found at: legislation.sa.gov.au including:

- *Food Act 2001* (SA)
- *Livestock Act 1997* (SA)

All Australian legislation can be found at: legislation.gov.au including:

- *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) - Country of Origin Food Labelling Information Standard 2016
- *National Measurement Act 1960* (Cth)

Government Agencies

Local council

Requirements including:

- keeping honeybees
- hive location and density
- honeybee nuisance
- selling honeybee products for food

PIRSA – Biosecurity SA

Requirements for keeping honeybees can be found at: pir.sa.gov.au/bees including:

- beekeeper registration
- honeybee health
- hive identification and branding
- hive management
- Registration Forms
- Change of Ownership/Address Forms

SA Health

- requirements regarding selling honeybee products for food: sahealth.sa.gov.au and enter "Food Standards" or ring 8226 7100

PIRSA – Biosecurity SA Apiary Unit

Michael Stedman

Project Co-ordinator, Apiaries

Email: michael.stedman@sa.gov.au

Phone: 0418 812 698

Bee Biosecurity Officer

Phone: 0439 864 382

Other Resources

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

- requirements regarding selling honeybee products for food: accc.gov.au/publications/country-of-origin-food-labelling

AgriFutures

- publications on honeybees (including *Australian Beekeeping Guide*, and *Bee Friendly - a planting guide for European honeybees and Australian native pollinators*): agrifutures.com.au

BeeAware

- national honeybee information hub: beeaware.org.au

Food Standards Australia New Zealand

- requirements regarding selling honeybee products for food: foodstandards.gov.au

NSW DPI

- publications and courses on honeybees and native bees (including *Bee Agskills*, *Healthy Bees*, *Honey Harvesting and Extracting*, and *Australian Native Bees*): local.nsw.edu.au/publications/bees or ring 02 4939 8888/1800 025 520

Plant Health Australia

- publications and courses on honeybees (including the *National Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice*, and the online training course *Biosecurity for Beekeepers*): planthealthaustralia.com.au/national-programs/honey-bees

