

Native Bee Honey Given The Tick Of Approval

By: Dean Haley, Chair of ANBA honey committee, Brisbane.

The Australian Native Bee Association (ANBA) is very pleased that Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has approved our application to permit the sale and use of honey produced by Australian native stingless bees. FSANZ gazetted the new standard in Amendment No 229 to the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code on 22 July 2024.

FSANZ has performed a rigorous review of the data provided in the ANBA application, together with other relevant data. Their assessment found “no convincing evidence that consumption of native bee honey at the requested compositional requirements presents a health risk to the general population if beekeepers apply good hygienic practice during harvesting and processing.” Furthermore, FSANZ concluded that “risks to vulnerable populations are comparable to the risks from honeybee honey.”

The ANBA is pleased that FSANZ has reached these conclusions, ending speculations regarding the legality of selling Australian native bee honey.

The newly created *Food Standard 2.8.3 – Native bee honey* provides compositional requirements and labelling rules for Australian native bee honey. Standard 2.8.3 reflects the lower levels of reducing sugars, higher water content, and other characteristics which differentiate it from European honeybee honey.

In a FSANZ press release, CEO Dr Sandra Cuthbert said FSANZ has undertaken an assessment to determine the differences between Australian native bee honey and European honeybee honey and to evaluate any potential public health and safety concerns.

“The current definition of honey in the Code is appropriate to European honeybees, however honey produced by stingless bees has different sugar and moisture content so does not meet the current compositional requirements for honey.”

“The application seeks to distinguish these compositional requirements in the Code and establish a definition that is more appropriate for native bee honey” Dr Cuthbert said.

The ANBA believes that a food standard for native bee honey creates consumer confidence regarding its safety and nutritional characteristics. This delicious and uniquely Australian product is now available for the appreciation of Australians and New Zealanders. Stocks of this niche product are currently very low and you won't find it on supermarket shelves, but you can find niche sellers on the internet. Having a standard is expected to lead to an increase in production and availability of native bee honey.

The Australian Native Bee Association is a not-for-profit organisation committed to protecting and conserving native bees, promoting the sustainable use of native bees for agriculture and honey production, encouraging research into native bees, and working with Indigenous Australians in mutual respect and knowledge exchange. We acknowledge historical and present-day Indigenous Australians connections with native stingless bees, and recognise that bees and honey have cultural significance.

The ANBA gratefully acknowledges the work performed by researchers at the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI), an institute of the University of Queensland, supported by the Queensland Government, as well as Public and Environmental Health, Queensland Health which provided essential food composition knowledge that helped us prepare our application, also with funding from AgriFutures Australia.