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**PRESS RELEASE**

**American Foulbrood Disease (AFB)**

**A Serious Threat to Beekeeping and Agriculture in the Western Cape**

The WCBA (Western Cape Bee Industry Association) convened a meeting of beekeepers in Stellenbosch on Tuesday 09 December 2014 to discuss the current situation in the Western Cape with regards to the bacterial disease of honey bees termed American Foulbrood (AFB). Representatives of all regions and beekeeping associations in the Western Cape were present at the meeting where it was decided that recommendations and resolutions resulting from the meeting would be presented on behalf of all beekeepers in the Western Cape, but under the banner of WCBA as the convener of the initiative.

Following feedback and reports from the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and beekeepers on the current AFB situation in the Western Cape, the meeting resolved the following:

- That the AFB outbreak in the honey bee population of the Western Cape has not dissipated as was hoped but rather has spread widely in the province and is now to be found in most beekeeping operations;
- That there are no obvious signs of natural tolerance in the Cape honey bee population to the disease;
- That the extent of the disease has reached near-epidemic proportions in some areas, notably in Cape Town and the Boland;
- That the disease is negatively affecting the honey bee population of the Western Cape, including the wild honey bee population;
- That the disease poses a current and substantial threat to beekeeping and insect pollinated crop production in the province, and a potential threat to beekeeping and insect pollinated crop production in the rest of South Africa and the rest of Africa;
- That active and intensive management on the part of both the beekeepers and authorities is required to address the AFB outbreak in South Africa;
- That the use of antibiotics is not considered to be a long term option;
- That the beekeeping industry and individual beekeepers are poorly equipped to deal with the AFB outbreak, with intensive training and a dramatic change in honey bee management thus being required;
- And that appropriate regulations and enforced compliance thereto orchestrated by the authorities is critical for any AFB management to be successful.

To this end the meeting, on behalf of all beekeepers in the Cape, urgently requests DAFF to:

- Enforce and administer the recent honey bee regulations that deal with AFB management (Notice No. R858 of the Agricultural Pests Act, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2013),
- Including the appointment of qualified honey bee inspectors,
- The institution of the necessary processes to begin reducing the levels of the AFB outbreak in South Africa,
- And the initiation of research and monitoring of the disease in the country.

The meeting urges all beekeepers in the Cape to fully assist and support the authorities in their efforts to manage the disease, and commits the WCBA to the following actions:

- The compilation of a comprehensive pamphlet on 'Living with AFB', and the electronic distribution of this pamphlet to all known beekeepers in the Cape by the end of this year;
- The holding of a series of AFB field-days throughout the Cape during the course of January 2015;
- The initiation of dialogue with the insect dependent crop producer organizations early in 2015, to formulate appropriate strategies in response to the AFB outbreak;
- The initiation of dialogue in January 2015 with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, to appraise the Department of the situation, and to formulate appropriate responses *inter alia* the monitoring and regulation of AFB in the province, and research into the impact of the disease on Western Cape agriculture;
- The full support of Industry to the authorities to institute practical measures to prevent the further spread of AFB to other areas of South Africa and Africa, on condition that such measures are not unnecessarily disadvantageous to the beekeepers of the Western Cape --- such measures possibly including the registration of apiary sites, the prevention of movement of colonies from an AFB positive area to an AFB negative area, and controls on the movement of bee products from the Cape to other parts of the country.

The WCBA will seek urgent meetings with both the national beekeeping organization (SABIO) and with DAFF to address the above concerns and commitments.

## **WCBA**

Stellenbosch

18 December 2014