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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Guardian of the golden nectar**

### **Honey industry leader in the running for biosecurity award**

Lindsay Bourke, Tasmania's biggest beekeeper, is on a mission to keep Australia's honey the best-tasting, purest and safest in the world.

The owner of Australian Honey Products manages 3000 hives and produces 250 tonnes of honey every year, a large portion of it organic.

His bees pollinate 80 crops of fruit and vegetables, and his multi award-winning honey is processed and extracted in a Launceston heritage building which once housed a maternity hospital.

But it is for his implementation of best practice biosecurity measures to ensure food safety that Mr Bourke has made the shortlist for the prestigious Biosecurity Farmer of the Year award.

Ten years ago, Mr Bourke supported a group of concerned apiarists who established B-QUAL – a national, independently audited food safety accreditation system for the honey industry.

"The requirements of the yearly assessment and certification for B-QUAL are stringent," Mr Bourke says. "You have to have the records to identify where the honey was collected from and the history of the bees that produced it."

Ninety percent of Australia's honey is now extracted under the strict food hygiene conditions of B-QUAL and Lindsay Bourke would like to see every beekeeper participate.

"There are over 1800 larger beekeepers in Australia who produce most of the honey," he says. "But there are more than 8000 small beekeepers, many with just a few hives, who sell at farmers' markets and such places.

"We're trying to get as many of them as we can into B-QUAL because they have to understand that honey is a food, which has to be produced under strict extraction procedures."

Duncan Rowland, Manager of Biosecurity Planning and Implementation at Animal Health Australia, said Lindsay Bourke is one of the rare breed of individuals who demonstrates a deep commitment to biosecurity for both his business and the industry as a whole.

"B-QUAL covers biosecurity best practice for tracing, training and hygiene, and has allowed Lindsay's company to export honey all over the world," Mr Rowland said.

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For more information on Farm Biosecurity visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)

“The judges were particularly impressed with the way he has pioneered high-level biosecurity standards among his fellow producers and worked hard to keep our bees safe from biosecurity threats.”

Lindsay Bourke has been at the forefront of protecting Australian bees from the many threats lurking just beyond our borders, first as Quarantine and Disease Chairman, then Chairman of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council for the past seven years.

“We are the most threatened agricultural industry in Australia, with no less than twenty separate threats to the survival of Australia’s European bees,” he says.

These days, what keeps him awake at night is the Asian bee, already established in north Queensland; and especially the destructive mites it is capable of carrying – the *Varroa destructor* and the *Varroa jacobsoni*.

“At the moment, Australia is still a honey paradise. We are the last country in the world that doesn’t have *Varroa destructor*,” Mr Bourke says.

“Honey as an industry is only worth about \$80 million a year, but our bees directly pollinate an estimated \$4 billion of crops. Some, like apples, pears, cherries and almonds, would be lost without the bees.”

Varroa mites, tiny parasites which feed off honeybee larvae, have destroyed the European bee populations of Papua New Guinea and New Zealand.

“No country that has become infected with *Varroa destructor* has been able to stop its spread,” Mr Bourke adds.

He is championing the extension of a number of quarantine and surveillance programs aimed at containing the spread of the Asian bee and keeping Varroa mites out of Australia.

“There was a little bloke called Einstein, and he was pretty good with maths. He worked out that four or five years after the last bee dies so will the last of mankind... And we have so many more people to feed today!”

Hosted by Kondinin Group and ABC Rural, and sponsored by Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia, the Biosecurity Farmer of the Year award recognises the efforts of producers dedicated to keeping their operations free of diseases, pests and weeds.

Winners of all categories in the Australian Farmer of the Year Awards will be announced at a ceremony in Sydney on 7 September.

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**For more information, or to arrange an interview, contact Martin Blaszczyk, AHA, on (02) 6203 3988. (Images of Lindsay Bourke are available)**



## Further Information

### The Farm Biosecurity Initiative

Farm Biosecurity, a joint program managed by Animal Health Australia (AHA) and Plant Health Australia (PHA), is a national education and engagement campaign which provides producers with information and tools to reduce the risk of diseases, pests and weeds. Producers are encouraged to check their properties regularly and if they see anything unusual to call the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on **1800 084 881** or the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. For further information visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au).

### Animal Health Australia

AHA is an innovative partnership involving the Australian Government, state and territory governments, major livestock industries and other stakeholders. We work with our members and stakeholders to strengthen Australia's national animal health system and maximise confidence in the safety and quality of Australia's livestock products in domestic and overseas markets. For further information, visit [www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au) or call (02) 6232 5522.

### Plant Health Australia

Plant Health Australia is the national coordinator of the government-industry partnership for plant biosecurity in Australia. As a not-for-profit company, we service the needs of Members and independently advocate on behalf of the national plant biosecurity system. Our efforts enhance Australia's plant health status, assist trade, safeguard the livelihood of producers and support the sustainability and profitability of our plant industries and the communities that rely upon them. For further information, visit [www.phau.com.au](http://www.phau.com.au) or call (02) 6215 7700.

### Hotlines

The Exotic Plant Pest Hotline (1800 084 881) and the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline (1800 675 888) are free-call telephone services provided for people to report unusual plant and animal pests and diseases. The hotlines allow callers to directly report suspect detections to an area where action can be taken by knowledgeable staff.

