

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**17<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

### **NEW HONEY BEE RESEARCH CENTRE TO CREATE A BUZZ**

[ManukaLife Pty Ltd](#), a core participant in a new Cooperative Research Centre led by The University of Western Australia, will provide a much-needed boost to Australia's valuable, but largely untapped, honey bee products by bringing together both industry and academic expertise from across Australia.

Dr Liz Barbour, from UWA's Office of Research Enterprise, said the CRC for Honey Bee Products would resolve current industry problems that limited the value and expansion of the Australian honey bee products industry. Products include honey, beeswax, pollen, royal jelly, venom and honey bee export.

"At present, honey bee product value is estimated at \$125 million. What is often overlooked is that 44 percent of our food crops wholly or in part rely on honey bee pollination, which adds an additional farm gate value of \$6.5 billion. With the new Australian focus of fine food export, healthy bees are an essential ingredient for success."

"The low price of most honey bee products from Australia doesn't reflect their unique and pure qualities," Dr Barbour said.

"Australia, especially Western Australia, has one of the healthiest honey bee populations in the world so no antibiotics or chemicals from bee husbandry contaminate the products. Whilst Australia is surrounded by bee diseases, through our quarantine efforts, the worst (including the sucking mite, Varroa) have not yet reached our shores."

"If a major bee disease arrived in Australia, there would be a 26 percent decline in national agricultural production, which equates to a consumer surplus loss of between \$12.4 billion and \$27.2 billion," Dr Barbour said.

The CRC project will explore the market success of New Zealand's Manuka honey, derived from a particular *Leptospermum* plant, and the opportunities Australia honey presents to this market. While New Zealand has one *Leptospermum* plant species, in Australia, we have an additional 80 others. Already Dr Peter Brook's research team, from the University of the Sunshine Coast, have identified a number of unique Australian Manuka honey varieties for further development. The presence of these additional plant species, together with other Australian endemic flora, presents opportunities for Australian companies to create new hive sites and add value to existing and potential honey bee products.

ManukaLife is focused on building a sustainable Manuka honey industry of propagation, plantations, growers, apiarists, production and distribution channels, delivering an efficient commercial model between growers and product distribution. They plan to not only sell wholesale medicinal quality honey, but to also create an industry focused on the development and manufacture of Manuka products within Western Australia.

In 2016 ManukaLife planted 400,000 seedlings of high-grade *Leptospermum Scoparium* plants imported from New Zealand. Plantation took place across five different geographical and climatic locations, each of approximately 30 hectares, across WA's south west. In 2017, ManukaLife is planting out an additional 500 hectares in conjunction with the CRC. In doing so, they plan to trial

the deployment of multiple *Leptospermum* varieties on a largescale and will examine bee hive site deployment in Manuka plantations.

ManukaLife Managing Director Paul Callander stated “We are excited at the scope of the CRC initiative. We’re proud to be a part of this, as it will deliver direct outcomes and impact on the development of apiary businesses and high value honeys in Australia, as well as provide downstream industry opportunities in medical, pharmaceutical and cosmetic applications”.

“By gathering critical data, using GIS and economic expertise, the CRC will evaluate hive sites for both product quality and impact on bee health. This information will develop a ‘bee credit’ which in unison with the ‘carbon credit’ will give new found value to native bush sites and support their conservation.

“New product management systems from site to product, will equip a new era of high value beekeeping”.

The CRC will align with Australia’s ‘clean and green’ marketing focus and will be supported by the development of a chain of custody from bush to product. This chain of custody then becomes core to the training and education of stakeholders to protect the brand. Documentation of procedures together with nationally approved chemical and anti-microbial property analyses at critical stages will provide assurance of purity and product health activity.

Dr Barbour said honey bee disease-resistance is a complex issue.

“Claims have been made that Australia’s honey bee population has little resistance to foreign diseases. If true, any disease invasion would be catastrophic” she said.

“The CRC will develop a research network with the US, China and Europe so that international research identifying bee disease genetic markers can be integrated into the Australian honey bee population. This, together with providing bee health resilience, will provide a bee disease insurance policy to address this major global threat to the industry.”

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