PROTOCOL FOR THE EXPORT OF COMB HONEY, FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION, FROM TASMANIA TO MAINLAND AUSTRALIA

PURPOSE: To advise exporters and inspectors of the protocol for the treatment of comb honey for export from Tasmania to Mainland Australia, to ensure the comb is free of the bee parasite *Braula coeca.*

BACKGROUND: Tasmania is the only State in Australia where *Braula coeca* exists. It is a wingless fly which has developed a commensal relationship with the European honey bee *Apis mellifera.* The adult *Braula* feeds on debris around the mouthparts of the adult bees, especially queens. The adult *Braula* lays eggs in the honeycomb cells just as they are being capped. Upon hatching the larvae burrow through the wax of the cap, constructing branching tunnels about 5 to 9 cm long. These tunnels serve as a shelter for the larvae. The tunnels are easily seen and reduce the value of the comb honey.

Generally *Braula* only occur in small numbers and do not cause the bees any problem. However, studies in Europe have shown that *Braula* can occur in large numbers and cause irritation to the bee, they may even affect the egg laying capacity of the queen.

LIFE CYCLE: The life cycle of *Braula coeca* is about 3 weeks, from hatching to egg laying. After hatching, the larvae create their tunnels and then move about in them feeding on pollen, honey and wax, for about 7 to 11 days before they pupate. They are in the pupal stage for 3 to 8 days (longer in cold weather) and then they emerge from the tunnel as an adult. They may live for up to 6 months as adults. In general the *Braula* remain on the bees and only leave to lay eggs. They only appear to survive for about 4 days off the bee. The emerging adults need to get onto a bee within about 4 to 5 days or they will die.

DISINSECTATION OF COMB HONEY

The following protocol is based on studies that demonstrate the effect of freezing on the survival of *Braula coeca* in comb honey, killing any *Braula* larvae in the comb and preventing any eggs from hatching.

1. Freeze the comb honey to -15° Centigrade and hold it at this temperature for 24 hours, (i.e. all the product must be at -15°C for 24 hours.)
2. After freezing the comb honey, may be held at room temperature and must be stored and transported in bee free containers or transport vehicles.
3. The comb honey may only be cut and packaged for export in a bee-proof area. No other comb honey may be kept on the premises while the export comb honey is being processed. An inspector may check the process during packing.

   Copies of temperature data log, endorsed by the inspector, should accompany the declaration.

DECLARATION OF DISINSECTATION OF COMB HONEY FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

I……

of……

……..
being the owner of……..kilograms of comb honey, consisting of the following number and forms of packages……

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hereby declare that it has been subjected to the following treatment for *Braula coeca*.

1. Frozen to -15° Centigrade and held at that temperature for 24 hours.

2. After freezing, the comb honey was stored and transported in bee free containers or transport vehicles.

3. The comb honey was cut and packed in a bee free area and no other comb honey was on the premises whilst the export comb honey was being processed.

Signed…….Date……

(Attach a copy of the temperature data log.)

ENDORSEMENT BY AN INSPECTOR AUTHORISED UNDER THE *ANIMAL HEALTH ACT 1995*

I……being an inspector authorised under the *Animal Health Act 1995*, declare that, a) after due enquiry, I have no reason to doubt the above declaration in relation to the treatment of comb honey, and b) I have seen a copy of the temperature data log.

Signed……Name……

Address……

Date……Phone……..……..