



The General Biosecurity Obligation: Legal requirements for Queensland beekeepers



Whether commercial or recreational, all beekeepers are responsible for the health of their bees in each of their apiary sites. Minimising the presence of pests and diseases in your hives not only benefits you and your bees, it also assists in keeping your neighbours' bees and hives healthy and free of pests and diseases. This is especially true in the case of varroa mite, as re-infestation of hives is common when neighbouring hives are not managed effectively.

All beekeepers in Queensland have the General Biosecurity Obligation to ensure their activities do not spread a pest, disease or contaminant through their apiary or to other hives or apiaries.

As a beekeeper in Queensland, you must take an active role in managing biosecurity risks that are under your control. You are not expected to know about all biosecurity risks, but you are expected to know about those associated with your day-to-day work and hobbies.

To minimise the impact of pests and diseases on hives, beekeepers have a legal obligation to check, manage, control and eradicate where necessary, pests and diseases in Queensland. The Queensland **Biosecurity Act 2014** provides the framework for protecting the beekeeping industry, which is critical to accessing markets and industry sustainability. Protecting the beekeeping industry includes:

- healthy bees
- economic viability
- pollination services
- apiary products (honey, etc).

Hive registration

If you own one or more beehives, you must be a [registered biosecurity entity](#) with Biosecurity Queensland. This is important in a biosecurity emergency as registrations allow us to keep beekeepers informed of the situation, assess risk and trace



movements. The registration process is straight forward and free of charge for hobbyist beekeepers. A small fee applies to commercial beekeepers. Registrations remain valid for 3 years.

Each registered biosecurity entity is allocated a hive identification number (HIN). At least 1 out of every 50 hives must be branded with your HIN, however branding all hives as proof of ownership is recommended. For further information on placement of HINs on hives, see the [hive registrations and branding](#) website.

Steps to take to meet your general biosecurity obligation

Every beekeeper must take all reasonable and practical steps to meet their [General Biosecurity Obligation](#) (GBO), however how the GBO is met is up to the individual. Beekeepers can choose to implement a program of their own or choose a recognised program such as the [Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice](#). The key point is to apply best-practice biosecurity measures to minimise biosecurity risks, which in turn reduces the potential for pests, diseases and contaminants to spread. Not complying with the GBO is an offence.

The actions Queensland beekeepers can take to demonstrate they are meeting their GBO are:

1. [Immediately report](#) any significant changes to Biosecurity Queensland.

You should immediately notify Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 if you:

- notice changes in hive health such as scattered brood, chewed brood cells, crippled honey bees or a reduced honey bee population
- have unexpected losses (i.e. fall in production or sudden colony collapse)
- suspect the presence of a notifiable pest or disease (such as varroa mite or [American foulbrood](#)).

Hives should never be moved to a new location until they've been inspected, checked and cleared of all pests and diseases.

2. Practice good hygiene by coming clean and going clean.

You can do this by:

- wearing a clean veil, suit or clothes to each apiary site
- sterilising hive tools between hives
- wearing disposable gloves and changing or washing them and hands between hives
- washing and cleaning the bellows of smokers
- changing suits and veils if they become contaminated with honey or wax
- washing shoes or boots if they become contaminated with dripping honey
- bagging all disposable rubbish before placing it in a domestic collection point.



For more information on ways to practice good hygiene, refer to the [decontamination factsheet for Queensland beekeepers](#).

3. Implement good husbandry practices to minimise the risk of spreading pests and diseases between sites.

Good husbandry practices include:

- visiting clean hives or apiaries before visiting sites with a history of pests or disease (i.e. move from low-risk sites to high-risk sites, not from high-risk sites to low-risk sites).

- implementing a barrier system. Beekeepers can separate their hives, groups of hives, or entire apiaries into distinct units to prevent the interchange of bees, honey and hive components. Barrier systems can be applied to static locations (i.e. sites) or when moving hives between locations (such as segregating loads of beehives). Beekeeping equipment must be decontaminated between units and loads. More information on barrier systems can be found on the beeaware.org.au website.
- establishing minimum distances between large apiaries (apiaries with more than 40 hives) to prevent robbing and or dilution of queen bee genetics. Apiaries must be placed more than 0.8 kilometre away from other large apiaries and more than 2 kilometres for apiaries breeding queen bees.
- using irradiation to decontaminate used beekeeping equipment.

4. Perform regular hive inspections and manage varroa mite populations according to mite loading.

To ensure hives are kept free of all bee pests and diseases, especially those that are notifiable, Queensland beekeepers should undertake regular hive health inspections. For varroa mite, hives should be monitored monthly, especially in the first wave of the pest being present. Effective methods for determining varroa mite presence and absence as well as treatment thresholds include alcohol washing, soapy water washing and sugar shake. Sticky mat testing and drone uncapping are only suitable for determining varroa mite presence and absence.

Always:

- report varroa mite detections to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23
- treat varroa mite when approved thresholds are reached, as per the [national guidelines for varroa mite management](#)
- implement post-treatment monitoring to determine treatment effectiveness.

5. Follow current regulatory requirements when moving bees and beekeeping equipment.

It is the responsibility of the beekeeper to ensure they keep up to date with the latest regulatory requirements and emergency provisions for moving bees and beekeeping equipment. The [moving bees and hives](#) website outlines the requirements for Queensland beekeepers.

Queensland beekeepers must ensure they comply with current movement control requirements in the states or territories they are operating in, moving from and transiting through. Each state or territory has their own requirements for the movement of bees, bee products and used beekeeping equipment. It is up to you to check the movement requirements of the relevant jurisdiction.

The whole state of Queensland is a [Varroa Mite Biosecurity Zone](#). This means beekeepers must hold a [biosecurity instrument permit](#) to move bees (including queens), beehives, used beekeeping equipment and bee products (including unprocessed honey) into Queensland from states or territories where varroa mite has been found.

6. Move hives and apiary equipment in a quarantine-secure manner.

Quarantine-secure means the load has been wrapped in a way that prevents the entry or escape of bees. For moving live bees and supers, shade cloth is an effective material for preventing entry and escape of bees at departure, during the journey and upon arrival at the destination. For moving apiary equipment without bees, loads can be wrapped in plastic or secured in another way that excludes bees.

When securing the load, it's important to consider the welfare of the bees, safety of the community and road safety traffic laws.

7. Keep up to date records of operational activities.

Beekeeping records can be kept in hard copy or electronic forms and **must** be kept for:

- (1) **Chemical usage:** The use of agricultural chemicals for the management of varroa mite and other pests and diseases in Queensland fall under the [Chemical Usage \(Agricultural and Veterinary\) Control Regulation 2017](#), with users responsible for ensuring records of each chemical application are made. Users must record:
 - the product name and the situation for which the product was used
 - the person who used the product and the owner or occupier of the land on which the product was used
 - anyone who was responsible for organising, overseeing or directly supervising the chemical use
 - the date the treatment began and weather conditions
 - method of application and application rate.



All agricultural chemicals must be used in accordance with the label, Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) instructions.

- (2) **Bee or hive movements:** For any movement of bees or hives from where they are normally kept, beekeepers must create a movement record prior to the movement. Records must be kept readily accessible and legible for 2 years after the movement starts and produced upon request by a biosecurity officer. This applies to:
 - all Queensland beekeepers (commercial and hobbyist)
 - the buying and or selling of bees
 - moving colonised beehives.You do not have to keep a movement record if you are moving bees within your property.
For one-off movements of bees you can use the [single-use record movement form](#). However, if you regularly move bees or hives, contact us on 13 25 23 or email varroa@daf.qld.gov.au to request a movement and apiary record book for Queensland beekeepers.
- (3) **Hive inspections and results:** An effective way of taking reasonable steps to minimise a biosecurity risk is to record the details of hive inspections and varroa mite monitoring results. The records should include what was conducted, when it was conducted, who conducted the inspection and what was found. Biosecurity Queensland recommends recording hive inspections and the results using the [Bee 123 form](#), however other applications or hard copy versions are also sufficient.

Further information

For further information about the GBO, watch our video [General Biosecurity Obligation](#) or head to [General Biosecurity Obligation | Business Queensland](#) on the Department of Primary Industries website.