

Application for the approval of honey from native stingless bees as a standardised food – 3rd July 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Native Bee Association (ANBA) seeks approval for honey produced by Australian native stingless bees to be accepted as a standardised food in Australia and New Zealand. This honey is produced by native stingless bee species in the two genera that occur in Australia, namely: *Tetragonula* and *Austroplebeia*.

Honey from Australian native stingless bees cannot currently be sold in Australia and New Zealand as it does not meet the requirements of Standard 2.8.2 – Honey. This standard regulates honey produced by the European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*).

Stingless bees are small (less than 5 mm) black social bees that in the wild live in tree hollows. Honey produced by Australian native stingless bees has been harvested from wild stingless bee populations by First Nations people and consumed as part of their normal diet for many thousands of years.

In recent decades, it has become common to keep these native bee species in artificial hives and to extract a small amount of honey (about 1kg per hive per year) that is excess to the normal requirement of the bees for their survival. This honey is a niche food product – it is valued for its rarity, and for its unique and highly regarded flavour. It is in high demand by consumers.

The safety of honey from Australian native stingless bees has been examined having regard to production and storage, composition, potential for contamination, and history of safe use. Based on these considerations, the ANBA does not consider there to be any identified public health and safety risks associated with the consumption of native bee honey.

The honey from Australian native stingless bees is composed of well characterised sugars and other natural ingredients. Nutritionally, it is similar to honey produced by *Apis mellifera*. The low volume of honey produced by stingless bees means the level of consumption will always be low compared to the consumption of honey produced by *Apis mellifera*. It will, however, provide an additional source of naturally occurring sugars with minimal nutritional impact for consumers.

The purpose of this application is to have honey from Australian native stingless bees approved as a standardised food in Australia and New Zealand. To this end, the application seeks:

- To have a separate definition for honey produced by native stingless bees.
- To have a separate compositional requirement for honey produced by native stingless bees.
- To make the term 'native bee honey' a prescribed name.

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This will require a variation to Part 2.8 – *Sugars and Honey* as well as a variation to Part 1.2 – *Labelling and other information requirements*.

The ANBA proposes that a separate definition and compositional requirement for honey from Australian native stingless bees be established. This will clearly separate this honey from honey produced by *Apis mellifera* that is currently defined in Standard 2.8.2.

The ANBA also proposes that the term ‘native bee honey’ be a prescribed name to firstly, assist allergy-sensitive individuals who may wish to avoid foods containing honey due to the potential presence of small quantities of pollen and/or propolis and, secondly, to assist consumers to make an informed choice between this food product and honey produced by *Apis mellifera*, and to prevent misleading and deceptive conduct.

The ANBA will provide additional information to consumers to assist them to become more familiar with the honey from Australian native stingless bees as a new standardised food.

This application addresses all the requirements necessary to approve the honey from Australian native stingless bees as a standardised food in Australia and New Zealand.