

# DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

4 May 2022

## Min Statement Response – World Bee Day

### Intro

Thank you, Mister Assistant Speaker.

I want to reiterate the Minister's emphasis on the importance of bees. Bees *are* important. I think we're all – at least relatively – familiar with the phrase 'no bee, no me'. It's a simple but powerful message.

Many of my colleagues may not know that my mum, in north-eastern Victoria, is a very successful olive farmer, with 3,500 trees which produce eight to ten thousand litres of oil each year. Her produce is distributed globally and - like any farm, garden or produce – is highly dependent on bees.

My mum uses organic farming principles. In addition to relying on wind pollination, she also welcomes beekeepers to bring in hives to help cross-pollinate. Studies show that the addition of bees when plants are flowering significantly increases their yield, and the crop quality.

Firsthand, I understand – and have seen firsthand – the importance and positive impact of the humble bee!

## Why bees are important

Bees are – surprisingly, or perhaps not – one of our most fundamental environmental considerations. World Bee Day, coming up on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, is a great opportunity to highlight this.

Quite simply – we need bees. As the Minister said, they provide us with food security. The World Wildlife Fund suggests that one in every three mouthfuls of food we eat is dependent on natural pollinators; while the When Bee Foundation states that two-thirds of Australia’s agricultural production benefits from bee pollination.

As noted on the World Bee Day website: I quote - “In the absence of pollination, the plant species cannot reproduce so that if the bee species dies, so too will the planet”. Unquote.

I echo a comment made by Minister Vassarotti, that we have over 2,000 different species of native bees in Australia, and there are over 20,000 different bee species globally. Each one is equally important and has a role to play.

Bees are, of course, also critical for ecosystem health and biodiversity.

## The challenges

Globally, the number and diversity of bees are in decline due to a number of challenges they face, including insecticide and herbicide use, pests and

diseases, intensive farming, habitat loss and global warming, and a decline in commercial beekeeping.

It was great to hear some important preventative initiatives of the ACT Government in this space.

Unfortunately, some bee species are already listed as endangered.

Even fauna, such as bee-eating birds (yes, it seems counter-intuitive, I know, when we're talking about the need to protect bees to start talking about the animals that feed off them!!); but bee-eating birds would lose their prey and would start to die off; again having significant ripple and flow-on effects.

We would likely still have cereal-based crops to eat, as they're largely wind-pollinated. But fruit and vegetables? That's a different matter.

I'll be quite sad if we even start to lose even some of the wealth and variety of fruits and vegetables we have available to us.

Blueberries and cherries, as an example, rely on bees for up to 90% of their pollination. Hand pollination is a possibility, but it's incredibly labour intensive. I know it's not something that would be a practical option for farmers.

So, how serious is the situation for bees? - Pretty serious. Loss of bee populations is a real threat. We're already losing bees at an alarming rate. Hence, the need for a World Bee Day to throw a spotlight on this and help raise awareness.

## The solutions

What can we do?

We can recognise that climate change is real, and that the warming of our planet is real, and that climate change will negatively impact our bee population (amongst almost everything else we depend upon for environmental and human health and survival).

We – as individuals, government and businesses – need to do what we can to protect bees.

At an individual level, we can plant bee friendly gardens or balcony pot-plants. Plants including lavender, marigolds, primrose and many native species such as Abelia, Butterfly Bush, Callistemons, native daisies, grevilleas, many eucalypt species, tea tree, honey myrtle and native rosemary are all great.

We can reduce the use of herbicides and insecticides, and we can be mindful of the products and produce we buy and the practices of businesses behind those products and produce.

We can also show our support for beekeepers as a vital industry in our agriculture sector. In 2017, the contribution of honeybees to Australian agriculture through pollination services was valued at around \$14.2 billion. Individually, one of the best ways to show our support is to buy local honey and beeswax products.

I welcome the ACT Government's efforts in relation to the recently announced Food and Fibre Strategy; and it's great to hear how Canberrans are already engaging with this.

### Closing

I would also like to acknowledge the ACT Bee keeper website. It's a constant reference for me for constituents who report hives.

We as humans, have plenty more than one job; but one of our jobs is to help keep those bee species alive and to look after them, and raise awareness of their importance.

Thank you.

Ends