



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

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BUMBLEBEE REJECTED FOR LIVE IMPORT

Environment Minister, Peter Garrett has rejected a request to allow the live import of large earth bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) into Australia.

Mr Garrett said a plan by representatives of the hydroponics industry to allow the bees to be brought into Australia for crop pollination in greenhouses could have posed a serious risk to the Australian environment, native bee populations and native bird species.

“As we’ve seen with animals like the cane toad, originally brought to Australia to deal with pests in sugar cane crops, the introduction of alien species into Australia can have serious environmental consequences.

“While I appreciate the potential benefits of improved pollination for the hydroponic industry, the national environmental legislation requires me to adopt a precautionary approach to any proposal to introduce a new species into Australia.

“The scientific evidence and advice I have received suggests that the environmental and economic risks of a large earth bumblebee population spreading throughout mainland Australia are significant.

“No matter how hard we try to contain them to greenhouses the risk of their escape into the environment are too great.

“Bumblebees have escaped greenhouses and established in a number of countries, including Japan and Israel, despite strategies to contain them. The illegal introduction of the bees into Tasmania in the 1990s saw their rapid and widespread establishment – something that could easily happen again throughout southern Australia.

“Because these bees are such effective pollinators they have the potential to contribute to the rapid spread of weeds, including exotic species that have not yet become established. And because of their resilience to temperatures and adaptability, these bees would compete with native species for food.

“Large earth bumblebees can upset pollination and damage flowers when taking nectar, potentially robbing native birds of food - many of these are already under threat because of habitat loss and destruction.”

Mr Garrett said his decision followed careful assessment and consideration of public, industry and expert comment.

A similar proposal to import live large earth bumblebees was put up for public comment in 2006 and was rejected by all states and territories.

The large earth bumblebee is listed as a potentially threatening process in Victoria as a key threatening process in New South Wales and an invasive alien species in Japan.