

As many of you know, there are several bee related bills that were introduced for this session. We wanted to take a moment to discuss them and acknowledge the feedback and questions we've received. We appreciate those of you who have taken the time to provide feedback and we hope that this will help clarify some things for those of you who have been following along.

### **What is TBA's stance on HB4212 and HB2996?**

**HB4212:** This bill proposes a mandatory training program for bee removers. The bill would set up a certificate and/or licensure (unclear) for a "Bee Removal Professional," establish training requirements and require the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to set up industry standards for live bee removals. Administrative rulings by TDA could effectively end the current exemption from pest control licensing for beekeepers doing live bee removals. TBA has concerns about "Bee Removal Professional" certificates being issued by the state to non-beekeepers with limited training and experience. **TBA OPPOSES this bill.**

**HB2996:** This bill makes land in a residential subdivision (as defined by the Texas Property Code) ineligible for Open-Space agricultural appraisal. This prevents beekeepers who own property in larger-tract, primarily rural residential subdivisions that otherwise permit agricultural activities, from qualifying for ag valuation for keeping bees. **TBA OPPOSES this bill.**

TBA has fielded many calls, comments, and questions regarding these bills and we've been watching them both closely since they were filed. It is clear to us that these bills are not beneficial to beekeepers throughout the state. We have been working with our legislative contacts and key legislators to explain our concerns. We will continue to monitor both bills.

### **HB 2670 and SB 677 FAQs**

**What is the purpose of removing the intrastate permit? Are there any concerns in doing so?**

**Purpose:**

Repealing the intrastate permit is a step in updating and simplifying Chapter 131. While this was a useful tool in 1983 when Africanized bees and two new bee pests were moving into Texas, it provides no significant benefits today.

**Concerns:**

The repeal of this permit has direct consequences to those beekeepers on the master bee removal list published by the Apiary Inspection Service. This list has become a widely used tool by the public. The information for the master list is taken directly from the annual Bee Removal Transportation Applications (Intrastate Permit). If the permit goes away, the master list will no longer be published by TAIS. Last fiscal year there were 241 beekeepers whose names were on the master list. Beekeepers on this list will attest to its importance to their business and to the folks who contact them through the list.

The funds generated by the Intrastate Permit are 30% of the income generated by TAIS. The loss of funds to TAIS is significant and we believe could result in less services provided by them (i.e. attendance as speakers at educational events, educational material on pests and diseases and mitigation, etc.) and could possibly affect the Master Beekeeper Program.

**Will TAIS apply fees to those registering as part of the proposed “voluntary annual registration”? Why would they charge me?**

Under the proposed changes, TAIS would have the ability to set fees for voluntary registration. There is a provision in the bill for categories of registration for assessing fees, including a “no fee” registration. Registration fees will enable TAIS to provide the master list of beekeepers doing bee removals and to establish the infrastructure for beekeeper notification. The benefits of such a notification system have been discussed for many years, specifically with respect to pollinator protection plans, as a way to facilitate communication between beekeepers and pesticide applicators. Numerous states have requirements in place for pesticide applicators to notify registered beekeepers in a certain radius of pesticide spraying.

TBA & TAIS are very aware of the requirements imposed by some appraisal districts and municipalities to register with TAIS. That is why there is a provision in the bill for categories of registration for assessing fees, including a “no fee” registration.

**Are we currently required to register our apiary or as an individual beekeeper?**

Chapter 131 Section 131.045 currently states that the chief inspector may provide for the periodic registration of all apiaries in Texas. The intent of this section, which was added in 1983, was to allow the chief inspector to **require** the periodic registration of all apiaries in Texas, per the bill analysis. This was never intended to be used as a voluntary registration. In order to try to accommodate beekeepers who were being required to register by their appraisal districts for ag valuation for beekeeping, TAIS allows folks to “register.” TAIS provides no services to those registering an apiary and registrants are not even added to a TAIS email list. There is no provision for updating registration information so it is quickly outdated.

**Does TBA support or oppose mandatory registration?**

We feel that the voluntary registration is the best way to keep this decision in each individual beekeepers’ hands. Since we have heard strong opinions from beekeepers on both sides of this issue, we would have to do a huge amount of research before we even begin to tackle this question. Our goal for this bill is to stay narrowly focused on the less-controversial changes that will improve Chapter 131. We chose these areas of focus based on the changes with the widest degree of acceptance over the past 5+ years of working on legislative changes to Chapter 131.

### **What does the proposed change for the Import / Export Permit mean to me as a beekeeper?**

The import and export permit only pertains to those beekeepers moving bees into and out of Texas. Many beekeepers are currently required to apply for multiple permits during the year. The import and export permits will be consolidated into one annual permit, which will greatly simplify the permitting process for beekeepers and TAIS. This bill makes **no changes with respect to the inspection requirements** under the current statute. The inspection service does a good job monitoring the general health of managed honey bees in the state. Texas has reciprocity understanding with respect to health inspection certificates with several other large beekeeping states like South Dakota. Texas could not employ enough inspectors to constantly inspect the tens of thousands of hives that move in and out of Texas annually and if we did, it would not provide any increased benefit.

### **What does TAIS do for me?**

TAIS did 182 inspections last fiscal year and certified 293,389 hives. Their service to monitoring bee health is a benefit to bee consumers as well as bee breeders and beekeepers. The landscape of bee health has changed drastically over the years and we appreciate this partnership with the TAIS and their Chief Apiary Inspector (Entomologist) to monitor past, current and future threats to honey bee health. As members of TBA, we benefit from TAIS and their participation in TBA events and numerous beekeeper schools throughout the state, providing education materials, information on honey bee health, pests and diseases as well as their valuable partnership with the Texas Master Beekeeper Program.

### **Someone mentioned that TAIS is not under Sunset Review? Why not? Is this an issue?**

TAIS was under Sunset Review until 1985 when the Sunset Commission recommended TAIS be taken out of Sunset Review and the Legislature voted to do so, along with numerous other agencies. All of the funds generated by TAIS go directly to the State general fund and it is under the direction and **oversight** of Texas A&M AgriLife Research so the risk of this “being an issue” is quite low. TAIS is subject to and complies with the Texas Public Information Act.

### **What can I do to help TBA in their legislative efforts?**

Continue to follow along with us, ask questions, and stay up to date on the progress of these bills. We know many of you have already spoken to your representatives and there may be a time and place for us to take action as a large group on the horizon and we will certainly need your help. So, stay tuned, and thank you for your support!