

Several TBA members spent the entire day in Austin last Monday. There were three bee related bills aimed at promoting pollinator health heard by the Agriculture and Livestock committee and TBA dropped a card in support of all three as they are consistent with our mission to promote beekeeping in Texas. We were also asked by Representative Mary Gonzalez to testify on behalf of forming a Pollinator Health Task Force. We will proudly support this bill and bills like it.

The hearing on HB 2670 was a learning experience for the board members and legislative team members in attendance. We feel honored to have taken part in such a valuable part of the Texas legislative process. One of our resolutions for 2019, and likely one that will remain a standing resolution in the future since it is so fitting of our purpose as the Texas Beekeepers Association, is that “TBA will strive to represent the needs and concerns of all scales of Texas beekeepers.”

We’ve created a simple graphic to explain the premise behind HB2670, however, we wanted to go into further detail for those of you who are following along more closely. You can always read the entirety of the House Bill [HERE](#).

What does this bill address?

1. **Repeal** of the Intrastate Permit
2. **Simplification** of Import / Export Permitting Paperwork
3. **Optional** Beekeeper Registration

While this is a simple bill, there was a lot of research and thought put into it and so we’ve outlined the three aspects in much greater detail, below:

- **Removal of the Intrastate Permit:**
  - Who does this affect?
    - Most beekeepers. This permit is required by all beekeepers transporting bees across county lines and is the section of the bill that affects the widest range of beekeepers.
    - Since TAIS uses this permit to create the annually updated bee removal list they host on their website, it will directly affect bee removers who are currently on this list.
  - What does this accomplish?
    - It will eliminate the need for any size beekeeper to obtain a permit to move bees across county lines.
    - It removes an unnecessary permit and fee currently required by many beekeepers. Many small scale beekeepers may be unknowingly in violation of this requirement when moving their hives home for the first time. We feel that the removal of this Intrastate permit benefits beekeepers and does not compromise honey bee health.
  - What issues arise when removing the permit?
    - Revenue for TAIS: Why should beekeepers care?

- Revenue to TAIS will decrease by 30% with removal of this permit. While there is not a substantial fiscal note (in regards to state revenue) attached to this bill, it leaves room for TAIS to have to make up some of the lost revenue due to the removal of the Intrastate Permit.
  - TAIS' operating expenses will not decrease because this permit is repealed. They will still need to employ the same number of inspectors and keep the same office hours to provide the same level of services.
  - TAIS is not a large agency and removing funds from them increases the deficit of operating expenses compared to revenue for the single state agency committed to and focused on honey bees.
  - Our members have long asked for more services and support from TAIS and extension to be focused on beekeepers and education. This increase in services would require more money, not less. To remove 30% of TAIS revenue would be extremely short sighted for beekeepers' long term goals of having more assistance to help with honey bee health in Texas. In fact, one of our most widely supported resolutions was that "TBA will continue to pursue the creation of a Statewide Apiary Extension Agent."
- **Simplification of Import/Export Permit**
  - Who does it affect?
    - Those bringing bees (on comb) into the state. This bill does not affect current regulations on packages, queen shipments, or bees shipped without comb.
    - Impact on Commercial Beekeepers: It simplifies the permitting process and results in much less paperwork during the year.
  - Why does this matter?
    - Beekeeping is an already challenging and complicated industry. Simplifying the process for permitting for commercial beekeepers is a positive step for both the beekeeper and the regulating agency responsible for them. We recognize that commercial beekeepers are the backbone of the beekeeping industry because they play an irreplaceable role in the Texas economy, fulfilling critical pollination and production needs, TBA supports their efforts as it is consistent with another 2019 resolution to "include, represent and support current and future commercial beekeepers and their interests."
    - While this simplification is in paperwork only, it will allow beekeepers more time to focus on honey bee health in an industry already riddled with complications, uncertainty, and challenges.

- TAIS anticipates that the single annual permit cost would be only a little more than the current cost of one import and one export permit, and would offset revenue while also simplifying paperwork.
- Does this negatively affect honey bee health?
  - No. The annual inspection requirements remains unchanged by this bill. Ultimately, it is our responsibility and duty as beekeepers to partner with TAIS in upholding honey bee health. We should be regularly inspecting our hives and reporting American Foulbrood to TAIS. Commercial beekeepers, whose livelihood depends on the health of their colonies, are especially vigilant in inspecting their colonies for pests and diseases to ensure that they are not present or are at manageable levels.
- **One-time Apiary Registration vs. Annual Beekeeper Registration**
  - What is the current registration process?
    - In the most recent changes to Chapter 131 (1983) “Apiary Registration” was added. The original purpose was to allow the chief inspector, if needed, to require the periodic registration of all apiaries in Texas. It was not established to be an ongoing voluntary registration, but TAIS in an effort to accommodate the requirements of other state statutes or rules affecting beekeepers, has allowed beekeepers to register. This is a one-time apiary registration, never required to be updated and has no fee since there was no authorization for a fee to be charged.
    - While TAIS is within its power to require periodic apiary registration, it is also within its power to stop allowing registrations.
  - Why would we change that?
    - This *optional* beekeeper registration is an improvement to the current system, and allows those who need registration for purposes outside the scope of TAIS (special agricultural valuation or exemption from pest control licensing in the case of bee removers) a more guaranteed way to meet their needs. While there is potentially a charge associated with it, registration is entirely optional. If the benefit outweighs the cost to the beekeeper, then people will choose to register. TAIS has said that for those choosing to register, it will be a reasonable fee (guesstimated at \$25-\$35 per year).
    - As we all know, a significant number of new beekeepers will fail or choose to discontinue keeping bees within a year or two. An outdated list beekeepers is cumbersome and of no use, and is in no way representative of currently active beekeepers in Texas.
    - An annual, optional registration ensures that people who choose to be added to this registration list are kept more current.
    - Benefits to optional annual beekeeper registration:
      - It keeps a more up to date list of active beekeepers.

- It allows for the retention of the valuable and widely used “Bee Removal” list that TAIS hosts to stay updated and intact. This is a beneficial tool to the public, municipalities, and bee organizations.
- This optional annual registration allows beekeepers to choose which counties and locations they’re active in. Apiary locations change, beekeepers move and acquire new bee yards. In our discussions with TAIS, they have said that they would include locations on this registration as an optional field.
- It lays the groundwork for a possible optional notification system that could improve communication between beekeepers and pesticide applicators in the future. In fact, one of the main reasons for this addition was due to interest in supporting a notification system in the future. While third party systems have been actualized in other states with some success, Texas beekeepers are very protective of their apiary locations as they are considered “trade secrets”. With a state agency like TAIS controlling this information rather than a third party business, the hope would be that apiary locations remain protected while still promoting honey bee health.

While the classifications of small scale, sideliner, and commercial beekeepers are often used to describe the differences in practices and mindset, the reality is that beekeepers of all sizes are committed wholeheartedly in the health of pollinators. On our board, we have the small scale beekeepers that enjoy observing and learning from their handful of hives as well as the larger commercial beekeepers that sustain the agricultural industry in Texas through pollination as well as the growing demand from Texans for local honey. It is important for us to all work together, when we can, to make meaningful changes in Texas legislation. While HB 2670 / SB 677 may not be the most engaging or exciting legislation, it is an important step. It is responsible legislation that benefits a variety of beekeepers in the short term, and could allow for the infrastructure to communicate bee health related updates across the state of Texas benefiting all beekeepers who chose to participate in the long term.

As we mentioned, during our visit to the Capitol, we heard from beekeepers and special interest groups on issues unrelated to HB 2670 / SB 677. We enjoyed hearing so many pollinator related topics discussed in the Agricultural Committee and we hope that this trend of pollinator friendly legislation continues.