



📷 The artwork aims to raise awareness of declining bee populations and danger to our food security.

## Buzz over Aussie bees who produce our food

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### TOPICS Environment

Those wandering along Sydney's York Street may notice a stunning and colourful new resident: a huge mural of fruit, vegetables, flowers and bees that's doing the rounds on Instagram.

The striking design, by street artist Mulga, carries a serious message. The bright, stripy bees that buzz among our plants, transferring pollen and seeds from one flower to another, are important; they're responsible for almost a third of the food we eat.

Without them, many of our food crops would die, which would mean a lot less coffee, chocolate, avocado and cherries - for starters.

Bee populations around the world are in dramatic decline - down by 30 per cent in the US; 80 per cent in the Middle East. This is down to a various factors: climate change (flowers already bloomed by the time bees emerge from hibernation), the deadly varroa mite (that has wreaked havoc on European bee colonies but is yet to arrive in Australia) and

chemicals and pesticides such as neonicotinoids (where in Australia there is a push to stop their use).

A global #Bring Back the Bees campaign, initiated by natural beauty product company Burt's Bees, has just kicked off in Australia along with Tarronga Zoo and the When Bee Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that promotes awareness of the importance of bees for food security and funds research.

We have 1600 species of native bees in Australia and so far they have remained resilient to sharp declines thanks to strict biosecurity laws, but experts believe it's only a matter of time until our bees are impacted by issues affecting their overseas cousins.

Burt's Bees believes there's never been a better time to raise awareness. "We know that when bee pollination is managed well, there's a 24 per cent increase in crop yields," says Shaunte Mears-Watkins, general manager of Burt's Bees Australia and New Zealand.

"When our bee population isn't healthy, there is significant concern about the overall health of our future food system. Mulga's mural aims to bring to life the connection between the bees' health and food."

Mears-Watkins says while more research into pests and pesticides and how they affect bees is crucial, we can all get busy to help bees.

"Everyone can help the bees in a range of small ways such as planting flower borders with bee-friendly flowers and reducing the amount you mow your lawn. This gives the bees space to explore and pollinate as they fly about.

"They may seem like small things, but it's those small actions that Australians can make every day that will drive change to protect our bees", says Mears-Watkins.

Bees contribute \$A14.2 billion annually to the Australian economy; their pollination value is 140 times greater than the gross value production of honey, When Bee Foundation associate and economist John Karasinski has calculated.

Tarronga Zoo beekeeper Elle Bombonato agrees bees are about so much more honey.

"These guys are such important pollinators and we need to work harder to look after them," he says.

"They're like a canary in the mine - we see their decline and we know there's something wrong.

"Now we need to do something about it."

\* Burt's Bees will donate every dollar from the sale of their limited edition strawberry lip balm to the When Bee Foundation, which will help support Australian researchers defend the local bee population