

Media Release

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Returning and productive workforce secured through seasonal agriculture worker visa

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) welcomes the announcement of the introduction of a dedicated seasonal agriculture worker visa made by Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, David Littleproud.

The AFPA has previously called for a dedicated Harvest Work Visa with the objective of recognising the role temporary migrants play in the horticulture industry and reducing reliance on the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) or backpacker scheme.

“The majority of the 65,000 harvest roles in fresh produce are filled by visa holders, a growing number of these are returning workers from the Pacific and Australians, but overwhelmingly these roles are filled by backpackers. Industry’s reliance on backpackers, and the risk this presents has been highlighted during the pandemic” said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

The seasonal agriculture worker visa secured by the Nationals will complement existing temporary visa pathways, enabling the WHM to return to its purpose of a cultural exchange program and the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) to maintain its high level of pastoral care and foreign aid objectives.

“It is important to understand that the WHM program is fundamentally a cultural exchange program, designed to enable tourists to travel and work in Australia. While this has been invaluable to the industry to date in filling a critical labour gap, the introduction of the seasonal agriculture worker visa would enable the WHM program to return to its core purpose” said Mr Rogers.

Early details of the seasonal agriculture worker visa indicate that visa conditions will be similar to those of the SWP visa. These conditions would ensure there are adequate protections for visa holders and requirements for sponsoring employers.

“Importantly the introduction of a dedicated visa will encourage better terms and conditions for harvest workers. If the new visa is similar to the SWP visa, this will also enable visa holders to return year on year; this is a great outcome for industry in terms of securing an ongoing and returning workforce”.

“We agree with the Minister’s comments that this new visa will help set industry up for the future. Securing access to a productive and returning workforce has been a key priority for industry and a dedicated visa pathway for workers in ASEAN and the UK will go a long way to achieving this ” said Mr Rogers.

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***About the AFPA** - The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia’s key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The AFPA represents half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total; 1,000 plus growers through commercial arrangements and more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and up to 25,000 in the grower network.*