



Media Release

26 April 2022

Labor's renewed Pacific commitment is welcome but not at the expense of an Agriculture Visa with ASEAN

The Labor Party's policy on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and Australian Agriculture Visa (Ag Visa) announced today confirms an ongoing commitment to the Pacific, but does not address key challenges outlined by industry.

"The horticulture industry has been participating in and supporting the PALM scheme for more than 10 years. The PALM scheme forms a vital, structural component of the horticulture industry's workforce so it is pleasing to see that Labor's policy reflects a strong commitment to the PALM scheme" said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

Throughout the last two years industry has significantly increased recruitment through the PALM scheme with approximately 20,000 PALM workers now engaged in horticulture work in Australia. The rapid growth of the PALM scheme has seen a significant increase in processing times in country, delaying the recruitment of workers.

"Horticulture employers have invested significantly to increase recruitment from the Pacific, but this hasn't been without challenges. While we're aware of a significant work ready pool of workers in the Pacific there are real challenges in mobilising that workforce – limited international flights and processing constraints in country demonstrate the importance of complementing the PALM scheme with an Agriculture Visa available to different countries" said Mr Rogers.

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) have previously outlined the importance of an Ag Visa to complement the PALM scheme in a number of submissions including the National Agriculture Workforce Strategy and the Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration.

"We've been really clear that our priority is to develop a productive and returning workforce for the horticulture sector. The PALM scheme is a central part of this objective, but it is not the only answer, industry needs robust visa programs, with high standards and across multiple countries to achieve this outcome" said Mr Rogers.

The AFPA and other industry groups have been working with the Government for more 12 months on the development of an Ag Visa for ASEAN countries, which has most recently been agreed with Vietnam in an MoU in March 2022. The AFPA have reached out to the Labor Party on numerous occasions without response, to discuss the development of an Agriculture Visa and industry's workforce challenges.

"It is disappointing that despite reaching out numerous times to discuss these issues, the Labor Party has declined to engage or consult with industry before releasing their policy today. Despite not having had an opportunity to provide input, we would welcome the opportunity to engage on this critical area of policy" said Mr Rogers.

Media Contact: Michael Rogers - CEO, AFPA: 0409 648 911

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.