

Media Release

14 December 2021

Funding for Ombudsman key to levelling horticulture industry playing field

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is calling for \$10 million over 2 years to fund a dedicated horticulture taskforce within the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) ahead of changes being made to the piece rate provisions within the Horticulture Award. The horticulture taskforce would be responsible for educating, investigating and undertaking compliance and enforcement activities in the sector.

“Changes to the piece rate provisions within the Horticulture Award will set an hourly floor rate for all pieceworkers. This is a significant change to the Award. The AFPA has been consistent in calling for clear and enforceable piecework provisions within the Award. To ensure that these changes are enforced, we need to ensure that any non-compliance is addressed by industry stakeholders, the supply chain and a properly resourced Fair Work Ombudsman” said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

The changes to the Horticulture Award come at a time when there has been a significant shift in the composition of the harvest workforce. The last two years have seen a significant increase in the number of Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme workers employed in horticulture, with the total number of PALM workers in Australia now over 19,000.

The announcement of an Australian Agriculture visa program has also been welcomed by industry, while currently under development, Phase 1 of this program is anticipated to commence early in 2022.

“The AFPA has been working with relevant agencies on the development of the Ag Visa and we are very comfortable with the progress made to date. We have been consistently supportive of ensuring the program has high standards for employers and protects worker welfare. The settings for this visa are so important in delivering outcomes for workers and employers, and in complementing the PALM scheme” said Mr Rogers.

Changes in the harvest workforce composition, the industry’s Award and rising input costs are set to challenge horticulture growers into 2022.

“Investing in a horticulture taskforce within the FWO makes sense. There has been increased uptake of more regulated migration programs and there is about to be a significant shift in the Award, it is the perfect opportunity to really ensure that all growers are implementing the new Award appropriately and if employers ignore the standard that they are prosecuted” 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.*