

Media Release

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Industry welcomes announcement of clear timeframe from government on solving horticulture labour shortage in Victoria

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) welcomes the commitment from Agriculture Victoria at today's Rural Press Club of Victoria seasonal labour webinar that it will work with industry to restart the Seasonal Worker Program in Victoria on 1 December 2020.

"The commitment on today's webinar that Agriculture Victoria will work with industry to restart the Seasonal Worker Program in Victoria on 1 December 2020 is most welcome. Industry has been productively engaging with the Department on finding a solution to our harvest labour needs, and this gives the industry much needed confidence in its decision making as to how it will source harvest labour for the upcoming season" said AFPA CEO Michael Rogers.

Today's Rural Press Club of Victoria webinar outlined the challenges being faced by the Victorian fresh produce industry in accessing labour to harvest fresh fruit and vegetables.

"As part of the discussion today, I outlined that timing is now crucial, key Victorian industries such as summerfruit, table grapes and vegetables are rapidly approaching peak summer periods and without a plan to address these workforce shortages before 2021, industry will face significant challenges" said Mr Rogers.

In recognition of just how important this issue is to Victorian farmers, the Victorian government has already formally 'opted in' to restarting the Seasonal Worker Program. In a normal year there are up to 12,000 Seasonal Workers from the Pacific Island countries in Australia, there are currently only 6,000 in Australia.

"The Seasonal Worker Program workers are valued contributors to the fresh produce industry. Today's feedback that government is willing to work to a 1 December 2020 timeframe to restart this program in Victoria is of great benefit to industry and to the workers in the Pacific who rely on this work and return year on year" 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.*