

Media Release

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Pacific worker program restart to provide certainty to fresh produce industry

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) welcomes an announcement that will see the restart the Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme, allowing workers from the Pacific to come to Australia and help with the 2020-21 harvest.

“We welcome the announcement from Prime Minister Scott Morrison and applaud the commitment the government has shown to finding solutions to the workforce challenges being faced by the fresh produce industry as a result of COVID19” said AFPA CEO Michael Rogers.

“Harvest roles in fresh produce are seasonal, short term and often require large amounts of workers at one time. The workers from the Pacific under the Seasonal Worker Program are in many instances, returning workers, who are familiar with harvest roles. Allowing industry to access these workers will be critical in ensuring the ongoing supply of fresh produce nationally” said Mr Rogers.

There are approximately 12,000 Seasonal Worker Program visas issued annually, with these workers able to remain in Australia for up to 9-months at a time and return year on year, often working for the same employer.

“The Seasonal Worker Program workers are valued contributors to the fresh produce industry. Today’s announcement confirming the restart of this program is of great benefit to industry and to the workers to in the Pacific who rely on this work and return year on year” said Mr Rogers.

State and Territory governments must now ‘opt in’ to restarting the program, with quarantine requirements in place to ensure the health and safety of program participants and Australians.

“We would like to see State and Territory governments agree to allow the arrival of new Seasonal Worker Program workers under required health guidelines. The fresh produce industry is reliant on these workers and asks that the state and territory governments acknowledge the importance of these workers to securing the ongoing supply of fresh fruit and vegetables” said Mr Rogers.

The harvest workforce in the fresh produce industry is made up of approximately 50,000 short term roles across Australia, with most roles being located in regional areas. The Seasonal Worker Program requires rigorous labour market testing to ensure that Australians have an opportunity to first apply for roles in the fresh produce industry.

“Members of the AFPA have local recruitment targets, but we know that the application rate of Australians drops to only 4% when a job is more that 100km from a major city. Industry relies on the ongoing employment of both Australians and Seasonal Workers to continue to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to all Australians” said Mr Rogers.

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