

Media Release

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Recognition of migrant workforce highlighted in government roadmap

Released last week, the *Australian Government roadmap to attract, retain upskill and modernise the agricultural workforce* identifies the importance of securing a workforce for agricultural industries and outlines that recognition of migrant workers will continue to play an important part in filling workforce gaps.

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (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 Harvest Work Visa proposed by the AFPA would complement existing temporary visa pathways, enabling the WHM to return to its purpose of a cultural exchange program and the 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 a Harvest Work Visa would enable the WHM program to return to its core purpose” said Mr Rogers

In order to address integrity and compliance concerns, the Harvest Work Visa would require employers to become approved by demonstrating compliance with an ethical sourcing program, undertake labour market testing and certify reasonable standards of accommodation. Harvest Work Visa holders would be able to work in Australia for up to 9-months and return year on year.

“Importantly the introduction of a Harvest Work Visa has the potential to encourage better terms and conditions for harvest workers. The high degree of visa portability provides visa holders with the flexibility to transfer employment at short notice to seek better terms and conditions of employment”

“The Government’s roadmap outlines that there must recognition of the importance of temporary migrants in filling gaps within industry’s workforce. The best way to do this is to ensure that the visa framework reflects the importance of these workers and is robust and fit for purpose” said Mr Rogers.

The proposed Harvest Work Visa framework and implementation options is available [here](#).

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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.