

## Media Release

14 December 2020

### Queensland leading the pack on reducing industry labour shortage

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) welcomes the announcement from Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, The Honourable Mark Furner confirming the extension of the seasonal worker trial program until March 2021.

The extension of the trial in Queensland will enable growers to access workers from the Pacific via the Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme (SWP/PLS) to assist in filling critical labour shortages.

“The extension of this trial is welcome news for horticulture growers in Queensland. The Queensland state government has been leading the charge on the restart of the Seasonal Worker Program announced by the Prime Minister back in August” said Michael Rogers, CEO AFPA.

The AFPA and industry have been advocating across all State governments to facilitate a scaled restart of the SWP and PLS to address the predicted shortage of 26,000 workers in the sector by March 2021. To date, only Queensland, Northern Territory and Tasmania have facilitated the arrival of horticulture workers from the Pacific.

“Queensland has shown real leadership on this issue, particularly around the development and use of an on-farm quarantine measure for these workers. However, industry remains concerned that without the consideration of additional quarantine pathways particularly quarantine free arrivals, the scale of the shortages experienced across industry won’t be addressed” said Mr Rogers.

To date, approximately 450 workers have arrived from the Pacific to commence work on Queensland farms. There are currently 6,000 Seasonal Workers in Australia, and industry typically employs 14,000 Seasonal Workers annually.

“While the extension of the trial until March 2021 is welcome news, industry is anticipating that these shortages will continue and increase into 2021. Industry is calling for Queensland to permanently restart the Seasonal Worker Program to address these shortages and importantly provide certainty to growers that they will be able to harvest their crops” said Mr Rogers.

Industry’s claims of increased fruit and vegetable prices as a result of the shortage of harvest labour have been supported by the Federal government’s own data collated by ABARES which indicates that worker shortages could push the price of fresh fruit and vegetables up by more than 25 per cent.

“Industry has been actively asking all state and federal governments to implement solutions for workforce shortages; we’re at a critical juncture right now and the reality is that immediate action is required to address these issues which are rapidly escalating into 2021” 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.*