

Media Release

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National Labour Hire Licensing vital amid workforce shortages

Impending labour shortages are prompting the Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) to call on the Federal Government to act on its commitment to introduce a National Labour Hire Licensing Scheme to ensure that all labour hire providers operating in the horticulture sector are operating legally and ethically.

“Growers are finding it difficult to source workers and are therefore leaning more heavily than ever on labour hire providers. As a result, we are again calling on the government to implement a National Labour Hire Licensing Scheme to ensure all labour providers are operating under a consistent and enforceable standard” said AFPA CEO Michael Rogers.

Industry and governments have been encouraging local workers to undertake harvest work and many roles in the fresh produce industry are offered via labour hire contractors. National regulation is vital to ensure that all labour hire providers are operating legally and ethically.

There are approximately 70,000 short term harvest roles in the fresh produce industry nationally. The short-term and seasonal nature of this work means that many fresh produce businesses rely on labour hire providers to supply workers during peak harvest periods.

“Harvest roles in fresh produce are seasonal, short term and often require large amounts of workers at one time. The recruitment of these workers is often outsourced to labour hire providers that are able to coordinate these large seasonal workforce needs across a large number of often smaller growers and employers” said Mr Rogers.

Queensland, South Australia and Victoria have all passed labour hire legislation, however, these regulations and registrations are not consistent across states making the existing schemes difficult to operate for both labour hire providers and growers who operate across multiple states.

“Many growers have farms across different states and territories. State based labour hire legislation is a great start, but needs to be rapidly expanded to a nationally consistent scheme to ensure that all labour hire providers are playing by the same rules” said Mr Rogers.

Key to a National Labour Hire Licensing Scheme is the proactive monitoring of enforceable requirements, which would see non-compliance result in the suspension or cancellation of a labour hire providers license.

“Where there is evidence of proven non-compliance, licenses should be suspended or cancelled. This is vital to provide employees and employers confidence in any licensing system” said Mr Rogers.

“We want all workers and employers that choose to utilise labour hire arrangements to be assured that the labour hire provider is licensed and is therefore operated by a reputable business owner or company director. This is an assurance that should exist regardless of where in Australia a business is operating” said Mr Rogers.

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