



Media Release 3/12/2020

## **Berry body calls for fast tracking of national labour hire licensing scheme**

Berries Australia is calling for a national labour hire licensing scheme to be fast tracked in response to the release of the Working Holiday Maker Program Inquiry report and worker shortages.

The report, released on Monday by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, recommends the continuation of the Working Holiday Maker programme and the implementation of the recommendations of the Migrant Worker taskforce.

Berries Australia Executive Director Rachel Mackenzie said it was encouraging that the Committee understood the importance of the Working Holiday maker scheme to Australian agriculture but also acknowledged that dodgy labour hire companies were damaging the reputation of Australia and the sector.

“Due to the significant increase in labour needs over the harvest period many growers outsource to labour hire providers who are able to coordinate across a large number of smaller growers and employers,” Ms Mackenzie said.

“Competition for labour is extremely high and now more than ever we need a level playing field. In many instances the grower pays the contractor the right money, but those funds never make it to the workers and the growers feel unable to push back as they need the crop picked.

“Queensland, South Australia and Victoria have all passed labour hire legislation and Berries Australia has worked closely with the Queensland enforcement team in particular to clean out those who operate unethically.”

“Unfortunately, as there is no scheme in NSW it has become a hot spot for these dodgy operators as there is no oversight and they phoenix as soon as any enforcement is undertaken.

“Whilst the State based schemes are a good start 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.”

“Our calls for national labour hire licensing are consistent with the positions put forward by many of the Unions, the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association, the National Farmers’ Federation and the Australian Fresh Produce Alliance.

“Any scheme has to be underpinned by a robust enforcement model and we call on the Australian government to increase funding to the Fair Work Ombudsman and put in place significant fines for any wrongdoing whether it be by labour hire or the growers.”

“Berries Australia supports efforts by the supply chain to support ethical sourcing and we encourage our members to implement the industry owned Fair Farms program or SEDEX both of which are independently audited.”



Berries Australia is the peak industry body the Australian berry industry and is a joint venture between the Australian Blueberry Growers' Association (ABGA), Raspberries and Blackberries Australia (RABA) and Strawberries Australia Inc. (SAI). Berries Australia represents more than 1000 growers nationally with members ranging from small family farms to large corporate enterprises.

*For more information contact Berries Australia Executive Director Rachel Mackenzie on 0408 796 199.*