



4/12/2020

Berry body responds to allegations of worker underpayment

Berries Australia notes allegations made by the AWU and the McKell Institute about underpayment in the berry industry in the Coffs region of New South Wales.

Any fair minded Australian would agree that all workers within the horticulture industry must have confidence in knowing that they will be paid lawfully and treated fairly. This goes for all workers, whether they are paid directly by growers or employed through labour hire.

If the McKell Institute or the AWU have valid and verifiable concerns backed up by evidence, then they should provide this directly to the workplace cop on the beat, the Fair Work Ombudsman, rather than try and prosecute a case through the media. The Fair Work Ombudsman can deal with these matters in confidence if people are reluctant to come forward.

The Berries Australia Board met with senior staff from the Fair Work Ombudsman earlier this year and expressed its unqualified support for enforcement action to be taken against those employers found to be doing the wrong thing, including labour hire firms.

Along with many other industry bodies, we have been calling on the Federal Government to license labour hire operators to make sure the dodgy ones can't slip through the enforcement cracks and bring the whole industry into disrepute.

It is disappointing that the report contained factual inaccuracies about the 2nd-year visa extension and refers to the requirement for growers to 'sign' off on the 88 days. This has not been a requirement for a number of years, and it is surprising that neither the AWU or McKell Institute were aware of this.

END

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

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.