



Berries Australia welcomes the announcement by the NSW government that it will halve the quarantine costs for agricultural workers from the Pacific Islands.

Overseas agricultural workers entering the country under the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) or Seasonal Worker Program will be eligible for a 50 per cent subsidy of the cost of mandatory quarantine this financial year.

Chair of Berries Australia Peter McPherson said the announcement was welcome ahead of the significant labour needs of the upcoming berry season in northern NSW.

“Our calculations indicate that we will need around 16,000 workers for the NSW berry industry alone between July 2021 and February 2022 and, with the exodus of backpackers, we are reliant on locals and workers from the Pacific,” Mr McPherson said.

“Subsidising quarantine costs represents a good balance between ensuring the safety of the Australian community whilst ensuring our agricultural sector can access workers at an economically viable rate and continue to harvest their produce.”

Mr McPherson said the NSW berry industry brings nearly \$300 million of farm gate value to the Northern NSW economy and is a significant employer of locals in our more long-term roles. The ability to access workers from the Pacific at a reasonable cost means we can keep these locals in jobs and keep supplying high quality berries to Australian consumers.”

“The Pacific worker schemes are highly regulated and only approved employers can employ these workers with strict rules around the conditions of their employment. The Australian Government has made 22,000 visas available under these schemes.”

Mr McPherson said that while it was disappointing the subsidy was only in place for this financial year as it would end before the berry season hit full swing, he was hopeful that travel bubbles may be negotiated by then which would end the need for quarantine.

“We look forward to being engaged by the NSW Government to work through the details of the scheme and discuss suitable accommodation options for these workers once they have finished quarantine.”

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

Berries Australia is a joint venture between the Australian Blueberry Growers Association, the Raspberry & Blackberry Association and Strawberries Australia Inc.