

CORONAVIRUS — PACIFIC ISLANDER SEASONAL WORKERS

3. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to the Premier's quoted comments in relation to the state government's COVID quarantine program in an ABC online article published on 20 April, 2021, which states —

Premier Mark McGowan said the government would not be employing a two-tiered system for low and high-risk arrivals as flagged by Ms MacTiernan.

- (1) Does the government classify Pacific Islander seasonal workers as falling within the COVID quarantine program?
- (2) If no to (1), why not?
- (3) If yes to (1), why is the government proposing to quarantine Pacific Islander seasonal workers at either the Four Points by Sheridan Perth, Mercure Perth or Novatel Perth Langley hotels, given that these hotels do not meet ventilation standards?
- (4) On what basis was this decision made; and will the minister please table any advice?
- (5) What options is the government investigating for quarantining important Pacific Islander seasonal workers other than inner-city hotels such as the Four Points, Mercure or Novatel Langley hotels?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question and congratulate him on his appointment as the shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food. I look forward to years of useful engagement with him in this place.

- (1)–(5) I know the member strongly supports the work that we have been doing to bring out Pacific Islander workers to help with workforce shortages in the agricultural and horticultural sector. I am very pleased that 786 workers have arrived in WA since December. That has been a massive boost, particularly for horticulture.

Let me make it clear that all international arrivals are managed by the Department of Health through the quarantine process, but within that process there is an assessment of different risk factors. There is no doubt that the risk from people coming in from the South Pacific—from Tonga and Vanuatu, where there is virtually zero community transmission of the virus—is very different from those coming in from places like India, Germany and the United States of America, where there is a very high degree of risk. Whilst all of this is being managed by the Department of Health under a unified program, there is always an assessment of risk differential, and when making a determination that hotels may not be suitable for people coming in from very high-risk areas, they nevertheless remain perfectly safe for people coming from virtually zero-risk areas. To date, about 3 500 Pacific Islander workers have been brought in under this scheme across Australia and not one of them has tested positive in hotel quarantine.