

AGRICULTURE — WORKFORCE — RECRUITMENT

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

I refer to this government's announcement to fast-track the recruitment of nurses from overseas and interstate, including increasing the entry cap for people entering the state to quarantine and paying for these expenses. Will the government offer similar support packages for other sectors desperately in need of workers, including the agriculture sector, which is predicting the state's largest-ever grain harvest?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. As the member is probably well aware, we are actively running the Seasonal Worker Programme in this state and we currently have 1 400 seasonal workers whom we, through our state government unit, have supported coming into the state. We have two planes a month booked between now and the end of the year, subject to there being the demand from growers. By the end of this year, we are looking at having in the order of 2 000 seasonal workers who stay outside of our caps. They are not included in that cap. We have actively supported that program and driven it in this state. Many of those workers, of course, are not experienced in grain harvest. There is not a lot of broadacre farming in Vanuatu or Tonga, but we note that a lot of the backpackers who are traditionally used are not necessarily experienced.

In addition to that work, we are working very closely with people like Mic Fels from the grains division of WAFarmers to connect with workers from Vanuatu. We had a meeting with a group of farmers today at Mingenew about exactly the same issue—how we could bring a group out to that area. In addition, we have put a proposition to Minister Littleproud, the federal minister, about bringing in somewhere between 300 and 900 grain harvest workers from northern Europe. We have calculated how this would work and what the cost would be, and we are asking the federal government to open facilities for fully vaccinated Northern Europeans to come in to help to deliver the grain harvest. We know that hotel quarantine is absolutely at its max and we think that the use of commonwealth facilities, including those on Christmas Island, would be a practical outcome. We have done the costings and we think that it can be made to work. We have sent that off to Minister Littleproud and we encourage the opposition to use its good offices with the federal government to get it onboard to help us meet the situation.