

AGRICULTURE — PACIFIC LABOUR SCHEME AND SEASONAL WORKER PROGRAMME

1133. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Regional Development:

I refer to the minister's media statement of 15 October 2020 entitled "Supporting agricultural industries to secure workers".

- (1) Please table all correspondence between the state government and the Northern Territory government in relation to recruiting "Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme workers that have already quarantined in the Howard Springs facility in the Northern Territory".
- (2) Will any compensation be paid to the NT government for its costs associated with bringing these workers into the NT?
- (3) If yes to (2), what is the estimated cost of this deal and how many workers are eligible?
- (4) Does the minister concede that these workers may be highly specialised for certain industries such as fruit picking, meaning that other agricultural sectors would remain without access to a skilled workforce specific to their needs?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(4) We are in the middle of a pandemic and we know that sectors of the industry have become very reliant on European labour. It has never been proposed that any involvement from the seasonal worker programme is going to be such that it can replace all those workers from Europe. It is a question of doing the best that we can. We cannot magically dream up another 70 000 backpackers across Australia.

Let me explain what is happening with Howard Springs. Already in the Northern Territory there are two cohorts of Ni-Vanuatu workers who have come in, primarily to be engaged in the mango harvest. We have indicated to the NT government and to the labour hire companies or the approved employers that have brought them in that when those workers have finished their period and picked the mangoes out in the Northern Territory, they would be welcome to come over into WA. We understand a third cohort was being planned, but there was not necessarily a sufficient NT grower interest. We have indicated that we would be prepared to work with WA horticulturalists to bring that third cohort in. We have also, of course, been very clear that in relation to that third cohort, which would be quarantined in Northern Territory, of course we would not expect the Northern Territory to be out of pocket and we would need to enter into an arrangement whereby we share the cost between the WA growers and the state government. If that is going to happen, that will now be very much in the hands of these approved employers. We certainly are encouraging them.