

CORONAVIRUS — SKILLED AGRICULTURAL WORKERS —
BLADIN VILLAGE, NORTHERN TERRITORY

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

I refer to the announcement of a \$5.6 billion surplus by the Treasurer today for Western Australia.

Why can the government not find a few million dollars to open Bladin Village to ensure that our agricultural industry has workers for its grain harvest this year?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question.

Just to explain, Bladin Village is in the Northern Territory; we do not have extraterritorial reach. This is very much independent of all the things we can do. We are encouraging the Northern Territory. We would like it very much if the Northern Territory were able to do it, but that is a decision it has to make. We have been asking the commonwealth to get involved and help negotiate this through so that this can happen. I just do not understand why the member thinks it is acceptable for the commonwealth, which imposed the international barriers and has constitutional responsibility for this, not to help us organise it. We have been doing the costings and calculating what the charter flights would cost to try to assist. However, at the end of the day, the member cannot accept that Minister Littleproud and the Prime Minister can just say, “We’ll sign the visas and that’s all we’ll do. We’re not putting in place any scheme; we’ll just sign the visas if someone finds somewhere that they can go.” This is something that absolutely needs commonwealth engagement to deliver a result. I have to be honest: I do not think we will be able to get there, because we cannot get the commonwealth to engage in a process so that we can all work together to achieve this as a possibility. I regret that. I would very much like to have been able to do this, but we are working on other plans to help get the harvest off.