
Media Release

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SHEED CALLS FOR MORE ACTION ON SEASONAL WORKERS

Independent Member for Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed has called on the Minister for Agriculture Ms Jaclyn Symes to meet with fruit grower representatives in the Goulburn Valley to discuss their need to have access to seasonal workers for the forthcoming harvest. Ms Sheed took the opportunity during debate in the Victorian Parliament last Friday to discuss the deep concern local fruit growers have regarding their capacity to access an international workforce that is usually met with backpackers and Pacific Island workers.

"Growers have welcomed the funding announcement made by the Minister to address aspects of this problem, but they remain concerned that they will not have the labour force necessary in the time and quantity required to secure the harvest," Ms Sheed said.

"The number of people in Australia on working holiday visas has almost halved since international borders closed, falling from about 140,000 to 73,500 earlier this month. Backpackers have continued to return to their home countries during the pandemic.

Similarly bringing in workers under the seasonal worker program from the Pacific Islands will have its challenges and it is important that both the state and federal government work together to ensure that enough workers can be accessed through this scheme and the necessary quarantine and flight arrangements put in place. Growers need to know now that they can enter into contracts with workers in these countries and that those workers can reach their destination to commence picking on our farms," Ms Sheed said.

"A federal government inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker program has recommended that incentives be put in place to encourage young people graduating from school and turning 18 to work on farms and provide support to the agricultural and horticultural industries.

Hundreds of young people will be completing their final year of school in the Shepparton District in the coming months and it may well be possible to incentivise them to consider working over the summer months as fruit pickers, earning income prior to going to university or starting other work and educational opportunities," Ms Sheed said.

Other Quotes:

“We have seen that already this year around 160 seasonal workers from Vanuatu landed in Darwin, as part of a trial program to fill a labour shortage for the Northern Territory's a mango harvest.”

ENDS

Media contact

Jacqui Hawkins 0403 657 267 email: jacqui.hawkins@parliament.vic.gov.au