



# QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business  
Via email: [espurchasing@employment.gov.au](mailto:espurchasing@employment.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

## **Re: Harvest Labour Services Reforms to encourage Australian job seekers to take up seasonal work**

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive, semi-intensive and irrigated agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland farmers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ)
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association (QCGA)
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)
- Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA)
- Flowers Australia
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP)
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Mallowa Irrigation Ltd
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd.

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the 'Harvest Labour Services Reforms to encourage Australian job seekers to take up seasonal work – Consultation Paper'. QFF supports the submission made by our industry member Growcom. We do not seek to replicate Growcom's work but offer the following additional comments. We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

*The united voice of intensive agriculture*



## **Background**

QFF leads the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA)<sup>1</sup> – a voluntary partnership between industry and government organisations that provides leadership and advice to government, service providers and other organisations on employment, skills, industry training and workforce planning issues on behalf of Queensland’s agriculture and related industries. The Alliance seeks to address the mutual goals for partner organisations that focus on the attraction, development and retention of new entrants and existing workers to underpin the prosperity of Queensland’s agricultural sector now and into the future.

QFF understands that existing Harvest Labour Services (HLS) and National Harvest Labour Information Service (NHLIS) contracts are due to conclude on 26 June 2020. In the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government announced significant reforms to the HLS as detailed in table 1 of the consultation paper. This includes: expanding the number of HLS regions; incentivising HLS providers to place Australian job seekers into seasonal work; enhancing the NHLIS and the Harvest Trail website; and collaborating with the horticulture industry to develop industry-led proposals to promote seasonal work opportunities to Australian job seekers and help employers understand opportunities available to hire Australian workers.

## **Specific Comments**

QFF supports expanding the number of horticultural growing regions from 11 to 16, the extension to the boundaries of existing regions, and recommends the government also include an additional 17<sup>th</sup> growing region from 1 July 2020 centred around Bowen, as it is a significant horticulture production region.

Harvest Labour Services providers should be able to service a region in its entirety and demonstrate how they will achieve this, which may include through partnerships or sub-contracting with other appropriately skilled and experienced local organisations.

QFF notes that the list of eligible activities has increased, and we support the inclusion of all agricultural crops. HLS could be applied to employment across agriculture without restrictions.

Flexibility in the HLS outcome payments is key to respond to characteristics of employment offered in the sector. In particular, these initiatives should be flexible so that it caters for the variety of employment opportunities available and to allow for employment to be offered across multiple employers in a region.

The new incentive structure proposed is a positive step in encouraging HLS providers to take greater interest in the long-term participation of job seekers in the horticulture industry. These incentives are key to encourage providers to support the program. This should be complemented by ensuring jobseekers have a good understanding of the jobs available and consider extending outcome payment to employers.

The NHLIS and Harvest Trail website should be linked to already available resources delivered through industry bodies with regional links to stakeholders such as Growcom, the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN) and the RJSA.

In our experience, workforce programs and engagement succeed when they are led by industry. Collaborating with the horticulture industry to develop industry-led proposals to promote seasonal work opportunities to Australian job seekers and help employers understand opportunities available to hire Australian workers is imperative. For this purpose, programs that are led by industry groups such as QAWN and RJSA, and supported by relevant providers, will be the most successful. Such proposals

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.qff.org.au/projects/rural-jobs-skills-alliance/>



should be aiming to deliver initiatives that address industry's concerns and meet the expectations of employers.

As the most diverse job market of any sector in the economy, attracting, developing and retaining a fit-for-purpose workforce is a constant challenge in agriculture. Agriculture is and will remain a key employer, particularly in Queensland's regional communities, so it is critical that awareness, education and employment pathways for our sector are effective. QFF commends the government for its ongoing commitment to helping job seekers find seasonal employment while also assisting the horticulture industry to meet its labour needs.

If you have any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Diana Saunders at [diana@qff.org.au](mailto:diana@qff.org.au).

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin  
Chief Executive Officer