



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Wednesday, 2 September 2009

HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY AWARD

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (11.59 am): Sunshine Coast hinterland fruit and vegetable growers and horticulturalists across the state and country have received new hope in the face of potentially disastrous and devastating wage rises. As I have raised in this House before, the new horticulture industry award proposed by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, the AIRC, as part of its award modernisation process had the potential to destroy the industry. In my electorate, growers shared their concerns that having to pay weekend rates of up to \$43 per hour for pickers and packers would send them to the wall, bringing a key economic driver to its knees and placing many of my constituents and other seasonal pickers on the unemployment list.

Through constant lobbying by the Queensland Farmers Federation, Growcom, state and federal members and growers themselves, the federal government has now written to the AIRC to revise its advice. I am not sure whether the Attorney-General or the minister in charge of the department of primary industries were part of that lobbying effort.

The government has recognised the flexible and seasonal nature of the horticultural industry. It has also acknowledged the need for more intensive working periods at harvest time and the impacts of weather on working hours. Specifically, the advice to the AIRC was that it enable employers in the horticulture industry to continue to pay piece rates of pay to casual employees who pick produce as opposed to a minimum rate of pay supplemented by an incentive based payment, that it respect the perishable nature of the produce grown when setting hours of work provisions and that it provide for roster arrangements and working hours that take into consideration the seasonal demands and weather.

We are not there yet, but we are heading in the right direction. I and the growers in my electorate now await the AIRC's decision. We hope it, too, realises the economic importance of this industry and the employment opportunities it delivers.