




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Agriculture Industry

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) (10.07 am): As the COVID-19 crisis wreaked havoc right around the world, the Palaszczuk government quickly stepped in to provide support and ensure key sectors of the Queensland economy kept moving. Farmers and those along the supply chain wanted certainty and support from government and we were happy to oblige, of course. We were one of the first jurisdictions in the country to declare agriculture an essential service, giving those who bring our Queensland produce to the shops and dining tables around the country the confidence that their operations would not be disrupted.

Those opposite should be very interested to hear that the federal agriculture minister has praised the Palaszczuk government in respect to this particular crisis. In speaking of the federal agriculture minister, I want to make sure that today he is recognised for his support for Queensland in terms of the matters concerning backpackers. Those workers come to our shores not only to find work but also to holiday. There are certain requirements to ensure that we in Queensland are safe and that they are safe when they are working in Queensland.

These unprecedented times call for unprecedented cooperation. I have been meeting regularly with industry groups such as AgForce, Growcom, the Queensland Farmers' Federation and all of the industry sectors, in fact, through the agriculture coordination group. We are giving our fruit and vegetable growers the support they need to get on with the job of feeding Australia. During the winter months, Queensland feeds Australia and our growers rely on seasonal workers, many of whom are on working visas, to pick the fresh fruits and vegetables that end up on the dinner plates of Australians and also international customers.

Modelling shows we need up to 10,000 workers on average per month to ensure the harvest is completed in places like Wide Bay Burnett, Cairns, Moreton Bay, Darling Downs, Bowen and the Whitsundays. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused uncertainty about how those workers can continue to safely harvest our winter crops. There were legitimate concerns that backpackers coming from states with community transmission could turn up in regional areas and see a shutdown of that harvesting. That is why the Palaszczuk government worked with industry to develop a five-point framework that manages the risk of COVID-19 on farms while protecting the agriculture supply chains through access to a necessary seasonal workforce.

The framework consists of five key elements: stronger border protections, mandatory health plans, a general health obligation, stronger compliance and locally led solutions. The response from industry has been extremely positive. In fact, Growcom, the peak horticultural industry, told me just recently that the framework that has been implemented is better than any other state and territory in this country. They think our approach to supporting agriculture is way ahead of any other jurisdiction in Australia. Carl Walker, who I was speaking to on the phone just yesterday, the well-known representative from Bowen, has been fulsome in his support for measures that protect his and every other farm from COVID-19 through community transmission.

I would like to thank Growcom and all the other industry groups for their efforts over the last few weeks. We have listened and we have worked together with industry to help make sure they protect Queensland agriculture, because the Palaszczuk government backs our farmers 100 per cent. We always will support the agriculture sector.