




Speech By
Colin Boyce

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 25 March 2021

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Callide Electorate, Citrus Harvest; Water Infrastructure

 **Mr BOYCE** (Callide—LNP) (2.37 pm): I rise to inform the House of the situation in the Upper Burnett area around the Gayndah and Mundubbera districts in regard to the upcoming citrus harvest, as well as other issues regarding water, water infrastructure and the lack thereof.

The citrus harvest has begun with the lemon and lime crops underway. The Imperial mandarin crop harvest will begin in the coming weeks, with the Murcott mandarin crop later in the year around August. The harvest of this particular crop will put added pressure on the availability of seasonal workers as the Murcott mandarin harvest is a date oriented crop which has to be harvested quickly by large numbers of people to get container loads of fruit ready for the international export market. The Gayndah and Mundubbera area require in the vicinity of 2,000 people to pick the crop, and that is approximately double the size of what it was last year due to better seasonal growing conditions and better rainfall totals over the recent growing period.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has presented some unique logistical quarantine and accommodation problems that still have not been addressed satisfactorily. I have spoken to representatives of the Citrus Growers Association and they have been working together proactively as a grower body with producers and the minister's office to advertise extensively through outlets such as Seek to attract workers to the upcoming harvest to try to address this problem. Traditionally, many of these harvesting and picking jobs have been filled by backpacker population and protocols such as the South Sea islander agreement, which has people from the Pacific islands coming to Australia on limited work visas to attend to the harvest.

Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, this has limited the number of backpackers available and has presented quarantine and accommodation problems for people coming from the islands. Where do you house these people for two weeks in quarantine and who pays for the cost of that? The quarantine protocols as they stand are slow and unresponsive to the immediate needs of the industry. The projected cost of travel and quarantine is in the vicinity of \$3,000 to \$5,000 range for every person depending on where they come from. Assistance from federal and state governments to meet these costs would be welcome. However, there has been no commitment.

With the coming closure of JobKeeper one would think there would be an influx of people looking for work; however, this assumption is not turning into practical numbers. People are unwilling to travel or relocate and have the unrealistic expectation that growers will meet and supply accommodation and related expenses. There is also added competition for workers from the hospitality industry, where it is often easier to work in a more suitable location. The fruit and berry industry in the Gayndah and Mundubbera areas is a \$100 million industry that requires the ongoing reliability of water and irrigation for fruit and crop trees.