

Question on Notice

No. 673

Asked on 26 May 2021

MR J MCDONALD ASKED THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON Y D'ATH) –

QUESTION

With reference to an Ernst & Young report (2020) predicting a shortfall of farm workers in Queensland for the 2021 season due to COVID—

Will the Minister explain why applications made in December 2020 for pacific island workers to fill that shortfall, were not treated as a priority?

ANSWER

Queensland was the first jurisdiction to establish a trial for On-farm quarantine arrangements for workers entering Australia from Pacific Island countries following National Cabinet's agreement to the recommencement of the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) on 21 August 2020.

I am advised that between 29 October 2020, when the first group of Pacific Island workers arrived under the trial, and 22 January 2021, four charter planes and over 620 seasonal workers entered Queensland.

Queensland Health worked in close collaboration with various stakeholders to support the development and implementation of the necessary regulatory, administrative, and operational arrangements to enable this trial.

Under these arrangements, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) is responsible for the assessment and prioritisation of applications for the recruitment and quarantining of Pacific Island workers in Queensland under the PLS and SWP. Queensland Health plays a consultative role and endorse applications from a health protection perspective once relevant information has been provided by DAF.

The trial was approved under the premise that it would not result in any undue risk to the Queensland community and public health system or impact on Queensland's ability to repatriate Australian residents. Therefore, proposal assessments sought to ensure employers were able to comply with the strict legislative and operational requirements and work through any identified issues.

There have been no major public health incidents linked to the PLS and SWP programs. Thorough assessment processes and ensuring that no short cuts are taken have been critical to the trial success.

As announced on 3 March 2021, following the review of the initial trial, Queensland has agreed to continue On-farm quarantine arrangements and support the establishment of new industry-led regional quarantine facility arrangements, which will enable greater numbers of Pacific Island workers to enter Queensland under the PLS and SWP.