

Question on Notice

No. 813

Asked on 16 June 2021

MS A KING ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister provide an update on how the government is boosting labour efficiency in the aquaculture industry?

ANSWER:

The aquaculture industry creates jobs and contributes to the economic prosperity and commercial stability for regional and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2019-20, the combined Queensland aquaculture industry directly employed about 718 people.

Skills for Queensland: great training for quality jobs is the Government's plan to secure the state's future prosperity through a skilled and adaptive workforce. It aims to address the growing imperative to equip all working age Queenslanders with skills that meet current and future needs of the labour market right across the state.

In recognition of the expected growth in Queensland's aquaculture industry and the associated challenge of labour supply, the Government is undertaking research and development at the Bribie Island Research Centre (BIRC) to drive technological advances that will increase labour efficiencies. BIRC was the first dedicated, multi-functional aquaculture research facility to be built anywhere in Australia. A current focus at BIRC is ensuring aquaculture is digital-ready, which will allow for higher levels of automation and precision management that reduce manual workloads. Advances in automated water quality assessment, improved water treatment and aeration technologies; pond-side pathogen detection; proactive management of pond ecosystems; and the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence to the automation of labour-intensive tasks such as counting live feeds; will benefit the aquaculture sector.

The Government's Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN) initiative has seen direct employer engagement with much of the sector to assist in identifying workforce attraction and retention options, and to provide links to schools and employment and training providers.

The Government is also investing in new infrastructure to support secondary students to access at-school training in future skills, including growth industries such as aquaculture. This will fill the gap between skills training programs offered by TAFE and secondary schools.

As part of the \$5.5 million Digital Transformation in Agribusiness Initiative, the Agribusiness Digital Solutions Grant Program aims to assist agribusinesses to recover from the impacts of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by enhancing digital skills, creating regional jobs and driving efficiencies for business. The Australian Prawn Farmers Association recently received a \$200 000 grant to deliver the Prawn Skills Digital Training Hub to support prawn aquaculture agribusinesses to become digitally aware and ready to respond to future disruptions. The hub offers innovative ways to connect producers to consumers, reduce

problems related to remoteness in rural communities, and attract the next generation to jobs in the industry.

The Government continues to work with industry to identify aquaculture employment pathways and priority skill needs to help people complete relevant training to contribute to an effective workforce for the industry.