

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 802**

**Asked on 17 August 2022**

**MR C WHITING** ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

### **QUESTION:**

Will the Minister outline how the Palaszczuk Government is investing in good jobs and better services across Queensland agriculture?

### **ANSWER:**

The Palaszczuk Government is proud of its ability to create jobs in the agricultural sector. One of the hallmarks of this Government's backing of the agriculture sector is the Rural Economic Development (RED) Grant Scheme.

In the last term of government, \$10 million was invested in matched grants that helped rural and regional Queensland businesses to expand and to create jobs. The funding supported more than 30 projects and that, in turn, created more than 1,800 jobs across the state.

On the back of this success, a fourth round of the Scheme was announced. One of the first RED Grant recipients is Wallaroo Produce Supplies on the Southern Downs. Funding will assist this business to expand storage and packing line facilities and to upgrade cold rooms. This will enable increased vegetable production, provide 12 long-term, full-time jobs, as well as short-term construction jobs.

The Palaszczuk Government is also investing \$22 million over 5 years to boost preparedness for biosecurity emergencies, including foot-and-mouth disease, lumpy skin disease and African Swine Fever. At least \$7 million of this investment will go towards recruiting and training a dedicated team of 10 frontline biosecurity officers who will be skilled in disease protection strategies and specialised emergency responses and will be strategically located in rural and regional Queensland. This will be supplemented by an ongoing annual investment of almost \$2.5 million over 3 years to undertake communications, industry engagement and training to support industry uptake of preparedness strategies and address increasing biosecurity risks. This investment will also increase programs to strengthen preparation and prevention measures designed to protect the state's cattle, sheep, goat and pork industries which are an essential part of the Queensland economy and represent thousands of good jobs in every region of this state.

The Palaszczuk Government also recently announced a further \$4.416 million in funding over the next three years to enable the Queensland agriculture sector to continue efforts to attract, train and retain a skilled and high-performing workforce. This investment will continue the Rural Jobs Initiatives, comprised of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance and the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network, to support Queensland agribusinesses on a range of workforce matters, including raising awareness of how to source an appropriately skilled workforce and maintain the skills needed to ensure sustainable business operations. Since 2015, these initiatives have assisted agribusinesses on more than 23,000 occasions, leading to over 12,000 jobs supported and 8,000 training and education outcomes.

The Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance has been instrumental in providing expertise, strategic advice and access to networks to inform and guide the development of the Queensland Agriculture Industry Workforce Plan. The Plan covers the current and emerging workforce needs of the grazing, horticulture, cropping and aquaculture agribusiness sectors. The Rural Jobs Initiative is designed to support industry to address key challenges identified in the Plan.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries also works closely with the Federal Government's Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme; Approved Employers within PALM; and relevant Queensland Government agencies, to ensure that shortages of low and semi-skilled agriculture labour in regional Queensland are addressed.

The department will support the cultural needs of Pacific Island and Timor-Leste workers recruited through PALM in Queensland through the recruitment of two Senior Cultural Liaison Project Officers who will complement existing regional pastoral providers. These officers will ensure the department is appropriately informed to deal with any emerging issues that may arise with Pacific Island and Timor-Leste workers in the agriculture sector, with one officer based in the north and the other in the south of the state.

This sustained investment demonstrates the Palaszczuk Government's commitment to connect with and support Queensland agribusinesses' efforts to attract, develop and retain skilled workers and seasonal labour.