

## PRESS RELEASE

### ***Voice of Horticulture welcomes Federal Government's Backpacker Visa changes***

Peak horticulture body, Voice of Horticulture has welcomed the Federal Government's changes to the rules around backpacker and working holiday visas.

Australia's horticulture sector, in particular growers, now have greater access to a skilled labour community following changes to the Working Holiday Maker and Seasonal Worker programs.

Chair, Tania Chapman said it was a positive step in the right direction and the industry welcomed every opportunity to fill the huge labour void in the horticulture workforce.

Changes include:

- 🌱 Backpackers will no longer need to leave their jobs every six months and will be able to triple the length of their stay in Australia if they do extra agricultural work.
- 🌱 The age limit for working holiday visas has also be raised to 35 for people from some countries
- 🌱 The number of places available for Visas 462 will be increased.
- 🌱 The number of Seasonal Worker Visas granted to Pacific Island workers increases from nearly 8500 (2017-18) to 14,000, with an extended timeframe for labour market testing validity from three to six months. And, reduce the out-of-pocket costs for employers, who will be responsible for \$300 rather than \$500 of travel costs for workers.

"It is a much better solution than forcing Australians to work in a job that they don't want," Ms Chapman said.

"At the end of the day, growers have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in their farms, and producing their crops, and they cannot afford to invest in people who are unable to do the work, or who are not interested in doing the work."

Ms Chapman stressed that it was not just on the farms that there was a skilled labour force shortage, but as horticulture had boomed so too have opportunities along the supply chain.

"Whether that be in freight or logistics, in agronomic services or the many other industries that service and rely on horticulture – there are a lot of services that require labour," she said.

Some 419,000 backpackers visited Australia last year, spending 1.4 million nights in regional areas where they spent \$920 million.

"This really is a total win for Australia – a labour force available to harvest the Australian crops and ensure we all have fresh fruit and vegetables," Ms Chapman said. "And our exports continue to grow, and workers who are spending their earnings in local communities are helping to boost the Australian economy."

(ends)

*The Voice of Horticulture is a member based organisation that represents horticultural growers and business across fruit, nuts, mushrooms, onions, processing tomatoes, turf, and nursery plants.*

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