

## SEASONAL LABOUR STRATEGY

### Recommendations

Fruit Growers Tasmania (FGT) proposes the following strategy to help address forecast seasonal labour shortages in Tasmania's horticultural industries during the upcoming harvest season.

### Background

In March 2020, it became clear that the global impact of COVID-19 will affect the fruit sector in Tasmania.

FGT released a survey to growers in the fruit industry to determine their labour requirements in order to assist in planning for the expected impacts that the pandemic will place on businesses.

#### *Ongoing labour employment*

Survey respondents indicated that their businesses employ 1386 people in a permanent or regular casual capacity to undertake business activities. Of these persons, 512 (37%) are full-time employees, 43 (3%) part-time employees, and 831 (60%) are regular casual employees

#### *Expected seasonal labour need*

95% of respondents confirmed that they rely on seasonal labour in their business. The window of peak seasonal labour starts in November and finishes in May. January is the peak month with the fruit industry, requiring the highest number (7908) of seasonal employees. The expected breakdown of these figures is:

- 26% local seasonal workers, 2023 jobs;
- 19% Pacific Island Workers, 1517 jobs;
- 43% Working Holiday Makers, 3414 jobs;
- 12% International Students, 954 jobs

The monthly requirements for roles are outlined in Appendix 1.

### Key Challenges

- High dependence on seasonal workers
- Traditionally low levels of interest shown by domestic residents to fill seasonal roles
- Shortage of non-resident workers within the state
- No entry of overseas non-resident workers into Australia
- Decreasing pool of non-resident workers present within the country
- Reduced incentive for non-resident workers to participate in agriculture if they have already qualified for their second year visa
- Barriers to the movement of persons between state jurisdictions

### Core Strategies

1. Increase activation of Tasmanian residents to fill seasonal work opportunities
2. Increase attraction of non-resident seasonal workers to Tasmania

## List of Proposed Initiatives for Tasmanian Residents

### **1. NHLIS as central job advertising location (resident and non-resident)**

FGT proposes that the National Labour Harvest Information Service (NHLIS) be adopted by industry as a centralised advertising and recruitment point ahead of the upcoming season.

*Responsible party / Supporting Party*

Industry / NHLIS

*Activity*

- Facilitate linking workers with employers looking to fill vacancies.
- Limit people of uncertain health status going farm-to-farm.

*About*

Funded by the Commonwealth Government, the NHLIS links seasonal workers with employers seeking to fill seasonal vacancies. This free service can be accessed by producers, packhouses, processors, and labour hire recruiters, and is expected to announce a Tasmanian coordinator ahead of the coming season, who will act as a liaison and facilitator between employers and the NHLIS.

The NHLIS has national reach and is widely used by non-resident workers seeking seasonal labour opportunities. This provides a centralised point to attract non-resident workers to Tasmania to fill vacancies, a pathway for workers to move between jobs and regions, and a central point for connecting workers with other services/initiatives outlined in this document.

### **2. Tasmanian Marketing Campaign for Seasonal Labour Recruitment**

FGT proposes the spring rollout of a state-wide marketing campaign encouraging people to experience a working holiday within their own state. The campaign would seek to highlight seasonal job opportunities and experiences possible in Tasmania's regional areas and sectors, and encourage Tasmanians to reconnect with some of the most iconic areas of their home state.

*Responsible party / Supporting Party*

Tasmanian Government / Industry

*Activity*

- Market the presence and benefits of seasonal labour opportunities, and connect to central job advertising platform
- This campaign should target all mainstream media forms (radio, television, print, web, social media).
- Should be connected with employment service providers, senior secondary and tertiary education providers for dissemination to students on summer break, school leavers, and persons seeking employment.

*About*

Due to state and national border closures, Tasmania's horticultural businesses are increasingly turning to Tasmanians to fill seasonal work opportunities. Horticulture has a high requirement for workers to fill ongoing and seasonal harvest, sorting and packing roles, with the fruit industries requiring up to 8000 seasonal workers during peak season.

With many Tasmanian industry sectors continuing to be impacted by COVID-19, entry-level and seasonal employment opportunities for students and the recently unemployed are limited. School leavers in particular face a challenging and competitive job market, with few skills and experiences to draw from.

Tasmania's horticultural industries welcome anyone who is willing to have a go, no matter their background or experience level. It's a fun and engaging way to productively spend the summer, gain work experience, earn an income and explore regional parts of the state. Those interested in remaining within the industry can look to transition to ongoing work through further skills training.

### **3. Increase work allowance under Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, et al.**

FGT proposes that the Commonwealth Government support unemployed and underemployed persons to take up seasonal work by removing income barriers.

*Responsible party / Supporting Party*

Commonwealth Government / None

*Activity*

- That the maximum limit of Working Credits or Income Bank accruable by persons receiving JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Aged Pension or equivalent be increased to \$10,000.
- That persons receiving JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Aged Pension or equivalent be immediately issued with \$10,000 of Working Credits or Income Bank.
- That persons receiving Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, Aged Pension or equivalent be able to use Working Credit to offset income received from short-term or seasonal work activities at a rate of \$1 per \$1 earned until depleted for the purposes of receiving access to government services and benefits.

*About*

Harvest labour opportunities provide workers with short-term opportunities to earn potentially high levels of income, but only last for a short period.

Persons receiving JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and other government financial support programs are reliant on these programs for their long-term income, and recipients are averse to pursuing short-term seasonal work opportunities if they may jeopardise ongoing access to support.

## List of Proposed Initiatives for Non-Residents of Tasmania

### **4. Development of managed travel pathways between Tasmania and key Pacific Islander nations**

FGT is seeking urgent state and federal government assistance in developing safe travel pathways and protocols for Pacific island seasonal workers travelling from Tasmania to their respective home countries, and to facilitate the intake of new workers to replace them ahead of the upcoming production season.

*Responsible party / Supporting Party*

Commonwealth Government / Tasmanian Government/Industry/Worker

*Activity*

- Urgent development of a managed travel bubble between Tasmania and Tonga, Timor-Leste, Fiji and Vanuatu to manage:
  - the return of seasonal workers to their homes and families,
  - The intake of new seasonal workers to replace returning workers,
  - The provision of existing seasonal workers to remain in Australia

*About*

Tasmanian businesses employ approximately 1500 seasonal workers from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste through the Commonwealth Government's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS).

Many of these workers remain in Australia, and are working as Tasmanian work teams operating in WA, SA, QLD, and soon to be NT. These workers have now been in Australia for almost a year, and many are keen to return home to reconnect with family and social support networks. There is a duty of care to the health and wellbeing of the workers, those around them and their families. A failure to address emerging issues may have lasting repercussions for the ongoing diplomatic and social viability of these programs.

Based on the current pilot between Vanuatu and the Northern Territory, FGT requests the urgent development of a travel bubble and movement protocols between Tasmania and key Pacific Island nations to facilitate the movement of workers through the SWP and PLS programs. FGT notes that COVID-19 is not present in many of these island nations, and any residual risks could be managed through appropriate entry and exit quarantine protocols.

### **5. Streamlined pre and post border COVID-19 testing and quarantine**

FGT proposes that the Tasmanian Government develop streamlined pre and post border COVID-19 testing and quarantine arrangements for agriculture seasonal workers

*Responsible Party / Supporting Party*

Tasmanian Government / Industry / Worker

*Activity*

- Undertake COVID-19 testing pre departure
- Provision of subsidised quarantine accommodation post arrival
- Subject to departure state status, ability to quarantine in on-farm accommodation

*About*

Tasmania is competing with other states to attract the reducing number of non-resident workers still in Australia.

Every additional cost and inconvenience that is imposed on non-resident workers interested in working in Tasmania's agricultural sector will encourage them not to travel to the state.

## **6. Interstate Marketing Campaign for Seasonal Labour Recruitment**

FGT proposes a targeted marketing campaign aimed at interstate working holiday makers and school leavers to encourage them to undertake working holiday activities in Tasmania. The campaign would seek to highlight seasonal job opportunities, state's attractions and iconic experiences, and welcoming hospitality to working holiday makers.

*Responsible party / Supporting Party*

Tasmanian Government / Industry

*Activity*

- Market the presence and benefits of seasonal labour opportunities, and connect workers to central job advertising platform
- This campaign should target all mainstream media forms used regularly by seasonal workers (social media, web).

*About*

Tasmanian horticulture relies heavily on international and interstate working holiday makers to help carry out summer harvest activities.

With the borders closed to new entrants, Tasmania will need to market itself well to attract the required numbers of seasonal workers. This marketing should also link participants to the NHLIS to connect them with employers and any travel incentive schemes.

## **7. Subsidised inward travel into Tasmania for non-resident workers**

FGT proposes that seasonal workers demonstrating that they are traveling to a place of employment in Tasmania be provided with free or subsidised inward travel on the Spirit of Tasmania or airline equivalent.

*Responsible Party / Supporting Party*

Tasmanian Government / NHLIS TAS Coordinator

*Activity*

- The Tasmanian Government to subsidise travel costs for non-resident workers seeking to fill seasonal labour opportunities within Tasmania.
- Access to this incentive would be coordinated by the Tasmanian NHLIS coordinator.

*About*

The cost of travelling to Tasmania has been identified by the NHLIS as the single biggest disincentive for seasonal workers seek employment in Tasmania. With a looming national labour shortage, this disincentive makes Tasmanian businesses less competitive when competing on the national seasonal market.

Seasonal workers will also be encouraged to travel and explore the state, supporting regional retail and tourism economies.

## **8. On-farm accommodation for non-resident seasonal workers**

FGT proposes that Tasmanian businesses work with regional councils to establish camping areas to provide onsite accommodation for seasonal workers.

*Responsible Party / Supporting Party*

Industry / Local Government

*Activity*

- Develop regional guidelines for horticultural employers relating to the provision of on-site accommodation and camping areas for seasonal workers.

*About*

Tasmanian horticulture businesses are increasingly providing on-site accommodation to seasonal workers to improve the financial attractiveness of seasonal worker opportunities, reduce employee travel times, and reduce acute seasonal accommodation shortages in regional areas.

Providing on-site accommodation is also increasingly being seen by employers as a way of controlling and reducing the risk of employees coming into contact with COVID-19 from sources outside the workplace and ensuring compliance with new COVID-19 safety requirements that require employers to ensure worker accommodation meets the requirements for social distancing.

## **9. Third Year Working Holiday Maker Incentive**

FGT proposes that the required minimum period of specified work for a Third Work and Holiday (subclass 417 and 462) visa be temporarily reduced from 6 months to 3 months.

*Responsible Party / Supporting Party*

Commonwealth Government

*Activity*

- Temporarily reduce the required minimum period of specified work for a Third Work and Holiday (subclass 417 and 462) visa from 6 months to 3 months.

*About*

The number of Working Holiday Makers present within Australia is greatly reduced from previous years, with more continuing to leave Australia and return to their home countries at a steady rate.

The current required minimum period of specified work for a Third Work and Holiday (subclass 417 and 462) visa is 6 months. Seasonal workers unable to demonstrate that they have worked in agriculture or another approved industry are prohibited from applying for a third visa.

It is proposed that the minimum period of specified work be reduced to 3 months (the same as is applying for year two) to improve the attractiveness for these people to continue to remain present and working in Australia for this season, and to be available to support next season.

**Appendix 1: Seasonal and ongoing employment forecast for the Tasmanian Fruit Industry, 2020-21 financial year**

**Fruit Sector Business Seasonal Labour Requirements  
2020-21 Financial Year**

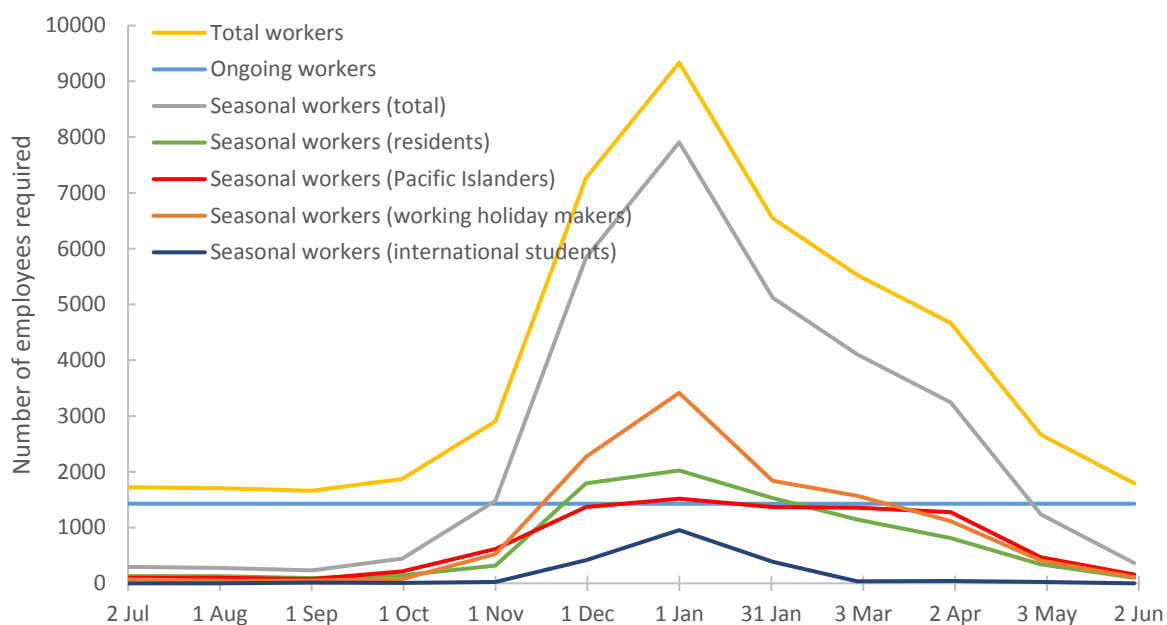


Figure 1: Forecast of required seasonal employees for coming 2020/21 season, graph below.

Table 1: A monthly breakdown of seasonal workers and totals are provided in the table below.

	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>LOCAL WORKERS</b>	<b>PACIFIC ISLAND WORKERS</b>	<b>WORKING HOLIDAY MAKERS</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS</b>
<b>JUL-20</b>	294	126	100	68	0
<b>AUG-20</b>	279	129	100	50	0
<b>SEP-20</b>	232	93	76	48	15
<b>OCT-20</b>	445	147	213	75	10
<b>NOV-20</b>	1481	316	614	526	25
<b>DEC-20</b>	5839	1790	1367	2267	415
<b>JAN-21</b>	7908	2023	1517	3414	954
<b>FEB-21</b>	5120	1531	1367	1837	385
<b>MAR-21</b>	4103	1146	1356	1566	35
<b>APR-21</b>	3243	813	1276	1114	40
<b>MAY-21</b>	1,237	338	466	408	25
<b>JUN-21</b>	363	98	156	109	0

**Appendix 2: Action Item List**

Item No.	Responsible Party	Secondary Party	Action Summary
<b>Tasmanian residents</b>			
1	Industry	NHLIS	NHLIS as central job advertising location
2	TAS Govt.	Industry	Tasmanian Marketing Campaign for Seasonal Labour Recruitment
3	Commonwealth Govt.	-	Increase work allowance under Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, et al.
<b>Non-residents</b>			
1	Industry	NHLIS	NHLIS as central job advertising location
4	Commonwealth Govt.	TAS Govt.	Development of managed travel pathways between Tasmania and key Pacific Islander nations
5	TAS Govt.	Industry / Worker	Streamlined pre and post border COVID-19 testing and quarantine
6	TAS Govt.	Industry	Interstate Marketing Campaign for Seasonal Labour Recruitment
7	TAS Govt.	NHLIS	Subsidised inward travel into Tasmania for non-resident workers
8	Industry	Local Govt.	On-farm accommodation for non-resident seasonal workers
9	Commonwealth Govt.	-	Third Year Working Holiday Maker Incentive