



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 25 February 2021

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Horticulture Industry, Seasonal Workers**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.32 pm): The Queensland horticultural industry is facing an unprecedented crisis off the back of a critical shortage of farm labour to pick and pack our horticultural produce. Despite the attempts of both the state and federal governments, local workers are missing in action and with backpackers having mostly returned to their home countries we face a crisis for the producers, the communities they live in and, in fact, for families throughout our nation. Make no mistake: this situation will hit families hard. Instead of paying \$4 a kilo for tomatoes, prices could quite easily hit \$40 a kilo on the supermarket shelves by the end of the year, which is a tenfold increase. Instead of the safe fruit and vegetables grown here in Queensland, we will need to rely on food produced overseas, often in questionable operations, that has taken weeks or months to arrive.

Our primary producers are facing the crunch and for some it may already be too late. Take the De Domenico family in Ayr as an example. They have 600,000 capsicum seedlings almost ready for planting and, while that sounds a lot, it is less than 20 per cent of the crop they would normally produce. The Rapisarda family, just up the road in Clare, face a similar dilemma and in Bowen more than 3,500 workers are needed if an average year's production is to take place. Let us not forget that it is a \$400 million industry in that area. Currently you can count the numbers available on one hand, but this affects more than the horticultural industry. In this state this cuts across the entire agriculture sector and even affects industries such as the meat processing sector. If there are any able-bodied persons prepared to have a go, I say head north to areas such as Bowen and the Burdekin where a worker with the right attitude can make \$1,500 per week.

This government is quick to talk up their credentials and policy around creating jobs, but right now in regional Queensland we have a job crisis. We need action, not next week or next month; we need it now. Without our seasonal workers, the economic lifeblood of many communities in regional Queensland is under serious threat, along with the budgets of families throughout Queensland and Australia.

This week we heard the minister talk about the Pacific islander program. Whilst we welcome those workers, we need a lot more. In fact, we need tens of thousands more and we need them to arrive within the next month because right now the farmers are preparing their land for the upcoming season. If those workers are not available, they simply will not plant their produce and that is going to have a flow-on effect right across the state by the end of the year. We need to take action. It needs to happen now. I am calling on the government to work with the agriculture sector to make that happen.