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MEDIA RELEASE

Last calls for farm labour taskforce

A taskforce aimed at filling farm labour shortages could be the answer to farmers' prayers, according to Member for Burdekin Dale Last.

Almost six months after the Federal Government announced 22,000 pre-vetted Pacific Islander workers were available to fill labour shortages on farms, Mr Last said there was still a significant level of uncertainty within the industry and it was time the State Government considered a more proactive approach.

"We're well past the time for discussion, with only weeks to go until this year's harvest season begins for many horticulture crops, it's now or never," Mr Last said.

"In a little more than six months the State Government would have managed to bring 550 Pacific Islander workers to the state, a mere 2.5 per cent of the 22,000 pre-vetted Pacific Islander workforce to a state that provides much of Australia's fresh fruit and vegetables."

"A specific taskforce encompassing representatives from both Queensland Health and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries could put feet on the ground to better identify and potentially fast track the distribution of workers across the state."

Mr Last said the Burdekin district was expected to receive almost 80 of the pre-vetted Pacific Islander work force in the coming month but would all be totally absorbed by one farm.

"My office is continuing to take calls from farmers who are extremely anxious about the upcoming season and are still to this day, trying to get through red tape," Mr Last said.

"The state government may say they are assisting the industry but we are yet to see them commit to proactive measures that could do some good in fast tracking the process and going some way to ensuring crops are not left in the fields to rot."

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