

NFF COVID-19 UPDATE

4 April 2020

Welcome to our special weekend edition of the NFF COVID-19 update, collating recent updates and information relevant to the agrifood supply chain.

We strongly encourage you to forward this brief through your network.

In addition to this regular brief, we are also maintaining pages on FarmHub with information relevant to farm businesses. Follow the links below to view those pages.

FarmHub COVID-19 Resources

[Key Information and FAQs](#)

[Border Control Information](#)

[Assistance and Support](#)

[NFF Workplace Guide \(New!\)](#)

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MINISTER LITTLEPROUD EXTENDS AG VISAS

This morning, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture have announced the extension of visas for critical agricultural workers, following calls from industry.

Key details of this announcement are:

- Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme workers can extend their stay for up to 12 months to work for approved employers (ensuring pastoral care and accommodation needs of workers are met to minimise health risks to visa holders and the community).
- Approved employers under the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme will need to continue engaging with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment on labour market testing to ensure recruitment of Australians first.

- Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) who work in agriculture or food processing will be exempt from the six month work limitation with the one employer and eligible for a further visa to keep working in these critical sectors if their current visa is due to expire in the next six months.
- Conditions will be placed upon visa holders to self-isolate for 14 days before taking up employment in a different region (including termination of visas where there is non-compliance).
- To support implementation of self-isolation arrangements for visa holders and avoid spread of COVID-19 the government is working with states and territories on enforcement and sanction mechanisms.
- Employers will need to commit to providing safe accommodation for agricultural workers that complies with social distancing requirements.
- Arrangement will also need to be in place for a declaration between employers and employees that all protocols necessary to ensure human health and accommodation requirements have been met.

We will share more detailed guidance on this announcement as it becomes available early next week.

NFF RELEASES COVID-19 WORKPLACE GUIDE

The NFF has released the first edition of its COVID-19 Workplace Guide today, to coincide with the announcement of visa extensions by the Federal Government.

The Guide outlines best practice guidance regarding living and working arrangements for farm workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. A copy of the Guide is attached, and can be found [here](#).

We sincerely thank members for their input and support in developing the Guide. We intend to regularly review and update this document as new information becomes available, so please share any feedback or recommendations with Ben Rogers (brogers@nff.org.au).

The Guide has also been referred by Government to Australia's Chief Medical Officer and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee for their consideration and input.

KEY MEETINGS AND BRIEFINGS THIS WEEK

In addition to ongoing representation across the various government working groups listed at the bottom of this update, the NFF has been in regular contact with the Prime Minister, Minister for Agriculture and their offices this week as a number of issues have arisen and been resolved (including roadhouse closures, air freight subsidies, firearms restrictions and visa extensions).

We have also taken time this week to brief Greens Senator Janet Rice and Shadow Agriculture Minister Joel Fitzgibbon on issues relevant to agriculture during the COVID-19 crisis.

Fiona Simson participated in Friday's AGMIN meeting, which provided an important opportunity to remind all agriculture ministers of the need to maximise consistency in how agriculture is treated as an essential industry – particularly in light of tightening state border controls. The communique from yesterday's meeting can be found [here](#).

NFF TO DEVELOP LIST OF ESSENTIAL AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

Out of Friday's AGMIN meeting, NFF has been tasked with developing a nationally-consistent list of essential agricultural services which the states can draw on for implementation of business and border closures.

The NFF is working with Member CEOs to review and refine this list, based on existing work by NSW Farmers and Dairy Australia. Members and Partners will have the chance for further input to this document in the coming week.

FAIR WORK COMMISSION PROPOSAL TO VARY AWARD

The Fair Work Commission has indicated it proposes to vary most of the Modern Award, including the agricultural awards, to:

1. include a right for employees to take two weeks of "unpaid pandemic leave"; and,
2. allow employer and employee to agree for an employee to take twice their annual leave at half pay.

These variations are intended to allow employees to comply with government directives to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. to self-isolate) particularly where other forms of leave (e.g. personal leave) are not available.

We have less than a week to lodge any objections, but feedback from the NFF membership so far has not indicated any objections.

ACCESS TO GROCERIES FOR RURAL/REMOTE AUSTRALIANS

Bulk grocery purchases by farming and remote families and businesses continues to be a priority issue for the Food and Grocery Sector Group.

The Group teleconference on Friday noted options for enabling bulk purchases were still being worked on.

Based on feedback from Members, NFF noted the preference for an application process for bulk purchases for businesses or individuals greater than 75kms from a store, verified by an ID with address or ABN.

We have also pushed for 'click and collect' services to be re-established for rural families. At this stage, we have been told packing of orders for vulnerable groups (those in quarantine, elderly etc...) are taking precedence over 'click and collect' customers.

Generally – supermarkets and grocery wholesalers are reporting gradual improvements in their stock levels, with service levels at around 90%.

INTERNATIONAL FREIGHT ASSISTANCE MECHANISM

As noted earlier this week, the Government is providing financial assistance and coordination services to assist exporters of high-value, perishable food products access airfreight services to select overseas markets.

The Fact Sheet on the initiative is available [here](#).

This is a 6-month, limited initiative targeted at seafood, red meat, dairy and horticulture exports.

Initial export markets will be Japan, China, Singapore, Hong Kong and the UAE.

Departure points from Australia will also be limited to Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, however the Government will assist export businesses located outside these cities with domestic transfers.

The Dept of Agriculture is gathering information on industry needs to guide implementation. You can provide your input [here](#).

REMINDER: WA AND QLD BORDER CLOSURES

Hard border closures take effect in both QLD and WA this week. Here is a brief reminder of the provisions in place in those states.

Western Australia

- [Hard border closure to come into effect midnight 5 April 2020 – WA State Border to close.](#)
- Hard border closure would at least a month.
- Exemptions currently being finalised and will include people who perform functions in:
 - Healthcare workers
 - Emergency services workers
 - Transport freight and logistics
 - People with specialist skills not available in WA
 - National or state security and governance, and
 - Courts and judicial services
- Exemptions would also apply for fly-in, fly-out workers and their families, but strict 14-day self-isolation measures would need to be followed when they first entered the state.

- Additional restrictions in place for the [Kimberley region as of midnight 3 April 2020. New boundaries in place for four Local Government Areas within the Kimberley. Existing exemptions apply.](#)

Queensland

- From midnight 3 April 2020, [entry into Queensland will be prohibited without a permit. Apply for an entry pass here.](#)
- Only 'exempt' persons will be allowed to enter Queensland.
- Interstate persons who provide critical services to Queensland, including construction, mining/energy/agribusinesses are 'exempt' provided their employer has provided a compliant plan to manage preventing the transmission of COVID-19 among its employees and the community.
- From 4 April 2020, additional restriction will be in place for interstate FIFO workers specific to the resources sector where only [critical resource sector employees will be allowed to enter Queensland from interstate to work.](#)

Further information on border closures, including links to relevant paperwork can be found at [FarmHub](#).

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Key Messages

The NFF encourages stakeholders to align where possible with the cross-industry messaging below.

- Australia is one of the most food secure countries in the world, exporting 75% of what we produce.
- The impact of COVID-19 on Australian agriculture is an evolving situation, farmers are making sure they have the best systems in place to protect workers and maintain the highest production standards but it's largely business as usual for farmers and the food supply chain.
- Panic buying by consumers is not necessary, and it's not helpful. There is plenty of food to go around. We just need to shop sensibly.
- The NFF is in ongoing contact with all levels of government, and helping to coordinate the flow of information to and from industry.
- It is critical that all levels of Government recognise agriculture as an essential service, and not restrict the flow of inputs or raw products through the supply chain.

COMMODITY BRIEFS

RDCs and industry associations are releasing tailored information on COVID19 developments relevant to specific commodities. Links to these are below. Please let us know of others that can be added.

- [WoolProducers Australia](#)
- [Dairy Australia](#)
- [Red Meat Advisory Council](#)

[Wool Industry – Shearing Operations: Protocols in response to COVID19 – Operations Document](#)

KEY CONTACTS AND CONSULTATION FORUMS

NFF is participating in the COVID19 forums listed below. Please forward any questions you would like us to raise in these forums to the following staff:

- Overall coordination: Tony Mahar – (tmahar@nff.org.au)
- Labour and workplace issues: Ben Rogers (brogers@nff.org.au)
- Border Controls: Warwick Ragg (wragg@nff.org.au)
- Stimulus packages and trade: Pru Gordon (pgordon@nff.org.au)
- Farm inputs: Adrienne Ryan (aryan@nff.org.au)
- FarmHub: Heidi Reid (hereid@nff.org.au)
- Communications and media: Laureta Wallace (lwallace@nff.org.au) or Charlie Thomas (cthomas@nff.org.au)

Forum	Convener	Time/day
NFF/DAWE Coronavirus Teleconference	NFF	Wednesdays, 3.30 - 4.00 pm
NFF Partner Briefing	NFF	Wednesdays, 4.30 – 5.00 pm
Member Communications Group	NFF	Thursdays, 4 - 5pm
NFF Member CEOs Meeting	NFF	Weekly, Tuesday 9.30am
Business Liaison Group (other attendees are ACCI, BCA, AIG ABA, and COSBA)	The Prime Minister and Treasurer	Tuesday, 31 March 2020
Food and Grocery Sector Group	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment	Mondays 10.30-11.30am
The Agriculture Ministers’ Forum (AGMIN)	Council of Australian Governments	Friday, 3 April 2020
Labour Forum	Attorney General’s Department	
Coronavirus – Industry Consultation	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Wednesdays, 2.00 - 3.00pm
Coronavirus – Industry Consultation	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment	Next TBC