

19 August 2020

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Via email: scott.morrison.mp@aph.gov.au

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier of New South Wales
Via email: willoughby@parliament.nsw.gov.au

The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
Via email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Mark McGowan MLA
Premier of Western Australia
Via email: wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au

The Hon. Patrick Gunner MLA
Chief Minister of the Northern Territory
Via email: chief.minister@nt.gov.au

The Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier for Queensland
Via email: thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

The Hon. Peter Gutwein MP
Premier for Tasmania
Via email: peter.gutwein@parliament.tas.gov.au

Andrew Barr MLA
ACT Chief Minister
Via email: barr@act.gov.au

The Hon. Steven Marshall MP
Premier of South Australia
Via email: premier@sa.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers,

A National COVID-19 Agricultural Worker Code for Domestic Border Movements

We write on behalf of farmers, agricultural contractors and technical specialists located across Australia to seek your urgent commitment to develop a national code to enable the safe movement of agricultural workers, similar to that agreed for the freight sector.

The varying approach to border restrictions by state and territory governments is unworkable and having a significant and detrimental impact on primary producers and regional communities.

We acknowledge the priority of governments is to maintain the general health of residents by imposing measures to suppress the spread of this insidious virus. However, all indications are that this virus will be with us for an extended period and additional strategies beyond domestic border closures must be considered, enabling us all to equally contribute to, and take responsibility for, the health and safety of the diverse agricultural workforce.

The operation of farms and food processors is dynamic and time sensitive.

The uncertainty as a consequence of border closures has meant that the farming and agri-business services sectors have faced further and unacceptable challenges after years of drought, catastrophic bushfires and for some, severe flooding. The recent widespread rainfall has meant that on-farm activity could re-commence. The COVID-19 response to close domestic borders is now placing significant emotional, well-being and financial challenges for farmers on top of what they have faced in recent years.

Essential primary production activities must be maintained. Beyond COVID-19 the ongoing health of Australians and the welfare of our animals must be prioritised.

Daily monitoring of livestock is essential for animal welfare. Cows must be milked, sheep must be shorn, lambs and calves will be born and must be monitored, produce must be picked, and the diverse grain crops must be harvested. These activities, by their very nature are time sensitive, requiring an additional short-term workforce, and timely access to specialist providers and contractors.

The grain harvest season is looming. As well as the important on-farm preparation, specialist contract harvesters will need to move from Queensland through to the southern states. Fruit, vegetable and nut growers rely on a seasonal workforce that will move north as the weather warms and the produce ripens.

The majority of these specialist service providers do not live in the tight border areas as currently defined. We are also concerned about the low number of personnel available to monitor borders to aid in agriculture-related movements.

The identification of a postcode to determine permit eligibility is a blunt instrument that does not recognise or provide an adequate response to the requirements of primary producers, nor does it recognise the ability and intent of employers (farmers, processors and contractors) to keep their workforce safe.

We strongly urge you, through the National Cabinet, to develop an agricultural worker permit similar to that developed for the freight industry to enable the critical movement of agriculture workers so that Australian farmers can continue to feed us all and ensure that all Australian are safe, healthy and economically secure into the future.

We offer the ongoing support of each of our organisations in the development of such a permit.

Yours sincerely,

FIONA SIMSON
President
National Farmers' Federation

JAMES JACKSON
President
NSW Farmers

DAVID JOCHINKE
President
Victorian Farmers' Federation

GEORGIE SOMERSET AM
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CHRIS NOTT
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SIMON SMITH
President
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NFF Member Organisations

