

Friday, September 2, 2022 | MEDIA RELEASE

URGENCY FOR LABOUR ACROSS AUSTRALIA'S FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN HAS NOT BEEN RECOGNISED AT JOBS SUMMIT PUTTING FOOD SECURITY AT RISK

- **The lack of immediate solutions will lead to higher food prices for consumers and reduced food availability**

In the lead up to the Jobs and Skills Summit, Australia's top peak food industry bodies calculated the food supply chain needed 172,000 skilled and unskilled workers from paddock to plate to continue the effective provision of food to the Australian community.

The Food Supply Chain Alliance says despite food prices and food availability being top of mind for Australian consumers over the past twelve months, as part of 'cost of living' pressures being experienced nation-wide, it does not believe the issues facing the food sector were given due priority or acknowledgement by the Government during the Summit. The likely result will be the negative impact it will have on Australia's domestic food security.

Pickers are needed to harvest horticultural crops, packers in warehouses and truck drivers for food distribution, workers in processing plants, fishers to crew our boats, staff to work in independent supermarkets and convenience stores and critically, over 100,000 staff to support the hospitality industry.

The Alliance said at the outset that this area was one of the few 'cost of living' pressures the Government can influence. The Alliance believes the food sector, given it provides an essential service to the community, should have been given priority at the Summit with tangible solutions found to be considered a success.

Whilst there are positive announcements overall they have missed the mark and failed to provide immediate relief to the sector such as:

- Increasing the permanent migration cap from 160,000 to 195,000 is a positive step but this 35,000 increased **does not address the immediate short fall of 172,000 workers** needed in the food supply chain.
- With over 900,000 unprocessed visas to be processed by government, hiring a 500-person surge workforce will still take over 9 months to reduce the backlog, **this is simply too long**. Food supply chain businesses need help now to harvest, pack, ship and distribute food to Australian consumers.
- The need for a **national food supply chain strategy** coupled with a **regional housing strategy** has not been addressed by the summit. Given the severity of the challenges facing the sector, the lack of announcements shows the summit has not taken the needs of the engine room of the economy seriously.
- **Getting pensioners and other welfare recipients into the workplace** is important as is simplifying the current temporary visa holder obligations and reducing employment deterrents such as payroll tax.

The 'Food Supply Chain Alliance' represents over **160,000 businesses** with a **revenue of over \$200 billion**. It includes the National Farmers Federation, the Australian Meat Industry Council, Seafood Industry Australia, Independent Food Distributors Australia, AUSVEG, Master Grocers Australia, Restaurant and Catering Industry Association and the Australian Association of Convenience Stores.

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