

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021

## Agricultural visa program will allow employers to treat workers like property

Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud, has conceded on RN Breakfast this morning that the new Agriculture Visa has virtually no limits on how employers can use short-term migrant workers, and evaded questions on whether it will allow workers to be traded between bosses like property.

Mr Littleproud had no response when asked whether it was true that the Morrison Government's Agriculture Visa has no limits on the number of workers that employers can bring into Australia, no limit on the industries that they can work in, and no geographic restrictions on where they can work. Despite the Minister's claims, the new scheme currently does not provide a pathway to permanent residency for workers.

The new scheme also has no mechanism for ensuring that workers being brought in are filling genuine skill shortages – meaning that employers have free rein to replace local employees with vulnerable migrant workers.

Exploitation of visa workers is not an isolated issue – a string of investigations has found systemic underpayment, abuse and exploitation. The rorts of the current system allow employers to slash labour costs by underpaying vulnerable workers.

Broken visa systems rob regional areas of what should be secure, reliable jobs in agriculture, meatworks, forestry, fisheries and a range of other industries.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"Minister Littleproud has accepted that his new visa scheme will allow employers unlimited access to vulnerable and routinely exploited workers – it will also allow these employers to trade workers like property.

"The Morrison Government is pressing ahead with this broken visa system because employers and the Nationals are demanding it. Workers are going to suffer so that the Prime Minister can secure his political position.

"There is no safeguard that would make a system where employers can trade working people like property acceptable. Workers must always be able to choose where they work.

"The Agriculture Visa will allow employers to bring in an unlimited amount of vulnerable workers, with no effective mechanism to ensure that they are filling genuine worker shortages.

"The Morrison Government is ploughing ahead with a visa scheme which will continue to gut reliable, secure employment in the regions through the mass exploitation of vulnerable visa workers."

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