

Bundaberg businesses audited

11 July 2019

Fair Work inspectors are today completing audits of about 40 businesses in Queensland's Wide Bay region, following concerns that employers in the horticulture sectors may be breaching workplace laws.

Farms, labour hire contractors and accommodation providers in and around the major towns of Bundaberg, Mundubbera and Childers have been visited since the compliance activity began on Tuesday.

Inspectors have requested time and wage records and completed interviews with growers, contractors and employees to check businesses are paying their staff correctly, keeping and maintaining records and issuing proper payslips.

Acting Fair Work Ombudsman Michael Campbell said the audits were a key element of the agency's Horticulture Strategy designed to build a culture of compliance in the horticulture industry.

"Following on from the Harvest Trail Inquiry, our inspectors are back on the ground to check employers are complying with their legal obligations under the Fair Work Act, the Horticulture Award and enterprise agreements," Mr Campbell said.

"We know the region is attractive to visa holders who can be vulnerable in the workplace due to concerns about their visa status or limited knowledge of workplace laws."

"If we find non-compliance in the businesses we audit, we will ensure affected employees receive the wages and entitlements owed to them. Where serious or repeat breaches are found, we will consider further enforcement action."

Fair Work Ombudsman intelligence indicates the Wide Bay region is one of the highest risk horticultural and viticultural regions in Australia for non-compliance. With a large number of farms, the area is attractive to working holiday visa holders looking to extend their visa beyond one year through required regional work.

The audits have been informed by a range of sources, including previous compliance history with the Fair Work Ombudsman, anonymous reports and external intelligence.

They include re-visits of some employers that were found to be non-compliant during the Harvest Trail Inquiry. The Inquiry, which the Fair Work Ombudsman published its [report \(https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/2018-media-releases/november-2018/20181122-harvest-trail-inquiry-media-release\)](https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/2018-media-releases/november-2018/20181122-harvest-trail-inquiry-media-release) on last year, found widespread non-compliance with workplace laws among the horticulture industry nationally.

During the Harvest Trail Inquiry, workplace law breaches were identified in 75 per cent of investigations in the Wide Bay region, well above the Inquiry-wide average of 55 per cent.

Information for employers and employees about workplace rights and obligations in the horticulture sector is available at www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture>).

The Fair Work Ombudsman has an agreement with the Department of Home Affairs where visa holders can ask for our help without fear of their visa being cancelled.

Employers and employees can visit www.fairwork.gov.au or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 for free advice and assistance about their rights and obligations in the workplace. A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

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