

Moreton Bay targeted in FWO compliance activity

19 September 2019

The Fair Work Ombudsman has commenced a series of targeted audits of 19 farms and businesses in the Moreton Bay region, north of Brisbane, following concerns that employers may be breaching workplace laws.

Fair Work inspectors have visited farms, labour suppliers and accommodation providers in Caboolture, Wamuran, Elimbah and the Sunshine Coast since the compliance activity began on Tuesday.

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

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

“As one of Australia’s largest fruit and veg growing regions, Moreton Bay attracts a lot of young and migrant workers who are vulnerable to workplace exploitation due to concerns about their visa status or limited knowledge of workplace laws,” Ms Parker said.

“Our Harvest Trail Inquiry identified widespread non-compliance with workplace laws in the region, so our inspectors have been back on the ground to check previously non-compliant businesses have changed their ways.”

“Moreton Bay region is one of the highest risk horticultural areas in Australia for non-compliance with Australia’s workplace laws, so we’ve also targeted businesses in the area based on intelligence that we have received,” Ms Parker said.

Fair Work inspectors will now assess audited businesses’ compliance with the Fair Work Act, the Horticulture Industry Award 2010 and other enterprise agreements.

“If we find non-compliance, 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, including through the courts if warranted,” Ms Parker said.

The Harvest Trail Inquiry, which the Fair Work Ombudsman published its [report \(www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/2018-media-releases/november-2018/20181122-harvest-trail-inquiry-media-release\)](http://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 56 per cent of investigations in the Moreton Bay region. The FWO recovered \$119,223 for 174 employees in the region – the third highest total recoveries for the Inquiry.

The FWO is making it easier to access information and resources on workplace laws for employers and employees in the horticulture industry with its new [Horticulture Showcase \(www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture-showcase\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture-showcase). The Showcase is an online hub of information, tools and resources tailored to the horticulture industry, covering the topics most relevant to growers and workers.

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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