

Fair Work inspectors to visit Bowen and Tully

13 June 2014

A team of four Fair Work Ombudsman inspectors will visit capsicum, tomato and banana farms around Bowen and Tully next week as part of an ongoing focus on seasonal workers.

The Cairns-based inspectors will make unannounced visits to properties selected at random to speak with growers and labour hire contractors about their obligations under federal workplace laws.

One property has been earmarked for investigation following information suggesting that seasonal workers may be receiving less than their minimum entitlements.

Fair Work inspectors will encourage pickers and packers to come forward to ask any questions they have about their pay and conditions.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says it is important that employers at Bowen and Tully understand their workplace obligations, and improving awareness is the main focus of the visits.

However, Ms James says any non-compliance issues that come to light will be addressed.

"We can tell a lot about an employer's level of compliance by talking to them and their workers, but we'll look at time-and-wages records if we need to get a clearer picture," she said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman continues to receive underpayment complaints from seasonal harvest workers and many are substantiated.

Last month, Fair Work inspectors wrote to about 60 employers around Bowen and Tully to advise them of this week's field visits.

They also provided a copy of the Horticulture Award 2010 and a range of fact sheets on topics including piece-rates, pay slips and tips for employers on employing pickers and packers.

Over the next few years the Fair Work Ombudsman will visit dozens of fruit and vegetable farms throughout Australia as part of its focus on the entitlements of seasonal harvest workers.

"We want to ensure employers understand and meet their workplace obligations and we're also seeking information about industry factors that influence compliance levels," Ms James said.

"This knowledge will help us to better target our education and campaign activities, particularly in relation to the overseas workers employed in this sector.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman has a strong focus on protecting the rights of overseas workers because we know they can be vulnerable to exploitation or unintended underpayments as they're often not fully aware of their workplace rights and can be reluctant to complain."

Employers and workers seeking information can visit www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture (www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/minimum-wages/piece-rates-and-commission-payments) or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

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