



07 OCT, 2020

## Amnesty divide erupts

Weekly Times, Melbourne

PARLIAMENTARY  
LIBRARY

INFORMATION | ANALYSIS | ADVICE

Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licensed copy  
or Copyright Act 1968 (Cwth) s. 48A copy

Page 1 of 1

### ILLEGAL WORKERS

# Amnesty divide erupts

By **NATALIE KOTSIOS** and  
**ALEXANDRA LASKIE**

AN amnesty of illegal workers would send “a dangerous message” to those flouting the law, Immigration Minister Alan Tudge says.

The push for an amnesty of undocumented farm workers has gathered momentum in recent weeks, as state governments urge the Commonwealth to find a solution to agriculture’s imminent labour crisis.

Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud last week said the Federal Government could make a decision on the issue within weeks, saying it needed “deep consideration”.

But Mr Tudge all but ruled out the idea, as he warned the use of illegal workers could not be condoned.

“An amnesty would send a dangerous message that it’s OK to flout our strong visa and migration rules, principles this Government has worked hard to secure,” he told *The Weekly Times*.

“By turning a blind eye to businesses who have been using vulnerable illegal workers, we also disadvantage all those businesses and foreign workers who have been doing the right thing.”

Mr Tudge’s comments stand in stark contrast to those of Mr Littleproud, who had committed to look at options for an amnesty at the request of state agriculture ministers, led by Victoria’s Jaclyn Symes.

It is estimated up to 100,000 undocumented people are in Australia, many of whom work on farms.

Some in the horticulture industry believe an amnesty would help the sector establish how many workers it needed, or attract new workers, as it faces a shortage of up to 26,000 casual staff by March.

Western Australia became the first state to publicly back an amnesty last week, after WA Agriculture Minister Alannah McTiernan said the

coronavirus pandemic offered a chance to deal with the issue.

Ms Symes, despite raising the idea at the behest of farmers, has yet to say if she supports an amnesty or not.

Queensland’s Mark Furner said immigration was a matter for the Commonwealth. Tasmania and Northern Territory did not respond to questions from *The Weekly Times*.

Tasmanian Agriculture Minister Guy Barnett has previously deferred the matter to the Federal Government.