

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Answers to questions on notice
Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Inquiry: Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic
Hearing Date: 5 May 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Worker Safety for Agricultural Workers
Question Date: 22 May 2020
Question Type: Written

Senator Rice asked:

In its liaison with state and territory governments, has the Department received any summaries from state and territory governments on steps taken to ensure worker safety, particularly in food production facilities and accommodation for agricultural workers?

Answer:

The department has been working closely with other Commonwealth agencies, state and territory governments and industry to support the supply of agricultural labour during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this role the department has facilitated sharing of advice on steps taken to ensure worker safety, including social distancing, hygiene practices and accommodation arrangements, between jurisdictions and industry.

These measures include employer/employee declarations, information toolkits and good record keeping practices.

State and territory governments have advised they are assisting the movement of agricultural workers across regions and states through ensuring requirements such as self-isolation, appropriate accommodation and health requirements are communicated to visa holders and met, where appropriate. These processes are consistent with the principles agreed at National Cabinet.

The department is also working with state and territory authorities through the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) to develop nationally consistent advice for consumers and food businesses in relation to COVID-19.

This advice is being disseminated through the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) website which provides links to Commonwealth, state and territory requirements for which businesses must comply.

Information on worker safety and hygiene practice for food processors and those involved in the handling and production of food was first updated on the FSANZ website in March 2020. The FSANZ website is being updated regularly in consultation with FRSC and the advice of state and territory health authorities.