



David Littleproud MP

Federal Member for Maranoa

Media statement

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Granite Belt's Christmas stone fruit hangs in the balance as Hanson and Lambie politicise backpacker tax

GRANITE Belt stone fruit is a family favourite at Christmas but the region's horticulture sector – often packed and picked by backpackers – is at the mercy of a Senate refusing to listen to local industry, continuing an uncertain and unnecessary tax stand-off, Maranoa MP David Littleproud said.

"In my home, locally-grown cherries and stone fruit is a must this time of year but the Granite Belt's packing and picking is in limbo as Labor backs Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie's move to halve the government's backpacker tax rate," Mr Littleproud said.

"The Coalition Government consulted widely with industry and came up with a tax rate which has struck the right balance between attracting working holiday makers and offering a competitive tax rate internationally.

"These two senators are playing politics, driving an industry off a cliff because they've failed to listen to what the agriculture and tourism sectors want.

"I feel particularly frustrated because Senator Hanson is now doing the one thing she said she'd never do, and that's play politics with the lives the Queenslanders she has been entrusted to represent."

The issue of striking the right balance in enabling a working holiday-maker workforce, while at the same time encouraging a local workforce, is a sticking point for the Maranoa MP – whose vast electorate often relies on backpackers in the horticultural sector during peak times.

"When I was young, I was a cotton chipper and if I looked over at Sven from Sweden getting more in the hand compared to me, as an Australian doing the same work, I'd know who'd be shouting the next round of beer at the local pub, that's for sure!" he said.

"At the end of the day, the most important thing is this sector is given certainty and I think most of us in Parliament recognise that Senate Inquiry's report, delivered last week, confirmed the Coalition Government's reform package should be passed.

"The committee recommended the bill be passed, citing that our reform package would not only ensure working holidaymakers pay a fair and competitive rate of tax, but also that Australia will remain a destination of choice for backpackers.

“Balancing these two principles is essential for the future of farmers and tourism operators who rely on transient labour to meet peak demand in their industries.

“The Coalition Government is serious about these reforms and ensuring there’s an ongoing working holiday-maker workforce able to meet industry demand in peak times.

“We recently announced \$10 million funding commitment to market Australia to working holiday-makers to ensure, despite any wavering perception out there, we remain a destination of choice.”

With only two weeks remaining in the Federal Parliamentary sitting calendar this year, passage of this reform bill is an urgent priority for local producers.

“As Parliament resumes on Monday, I call on Labor and the backbenchers support industry and urgently pass this bill as we’re now going into one of the busiest times for Granite Belt producers and this industry needs certainty,” he said.

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