

Press conference With Scott Morrison and David Coleman 4 October 2018

REPORTER: National MPs say you've been tasked with helping craft a new agriculture visa to help with the picking season this summer. Are you going to make an announcement before the end of the year?

DAVID COLEMAN: I'm not going to pre-empt a time line. What I would say is where there are opportunities for the immigration system to be better matched to regional needs, then that's what we should be looking at and that's what we are looking at. There have been some calls from farmers' groups and from agricultural groups to say that they think that the system could be better matched to their needs. That's something we are looking at very closely.

SCOTT MORRISON: And let me add to that. With the harvest season approaching what we need to know is where are the jobs needed, when are the jobs needed, for how long are those jobs needed, in which particular areas? Are there Australians there right now who can be doing those jobs and what can we be doing to ensure that those Australians are going into those jobs? We will look at all the issues around welfare and so on to ensure that Australians are going into these jobs, but where there is real shortages, you can't let the fruit rot on the vine and I get that. I was just up - I think it was last week - up in the Glass House Mountains and that is probably one of the sectors in the strawberry farming which we've had a bit to say about lately- if you don't pick them, you can lose the whole field. So these labour access issues are very important. But let's not forget the fact that in these areas there are Australians who can and should be doing this work and I want to make sure that they are being given the opportunities to do that and not giving them a leave pass for not doing it either.

REPORTER: Mark Coulton said this morning that the ag visa would likely be focused on 'higher skilled' workers- what sort of skills are you trying to target exactly?

COLEMAN: Well, again, I'm not going to pre-empt the outcome of the process we're going through but where there are opportunities for the program to be better matched to regional needs, we will look at addressing those.

REPORTER: Will you make sure that a new ag visa doesn't undermine the Seasonal Workers Program for pacific nations?

MORRISON: Yes.

DAVID COLEMAN: Obviously we've already made a very clear statement about the importance of seasonal workers program and we will look at ways of providing additional opportunities in regional areas.

MORRISON: The Pacific Islander Scheme has the priority in our program. Of course it does, and that's the assurance I give to all of the Pacific Island leaders who we have been engaging closely with. But we also know there are limits to how much that scheme can meet the overall demand. But we need to get a much better handle on that level of demand, so I'm highly sympathetic to that particularly coming into this next season. And so there are some short-term issues which need to be addressed which we've been working closely with our rural and regional colleagues both within the Liberal Party and National Party. But there are longer term issues that need to be addressed. We also want to make sure of this - everybody who comes to work in this country has to be treated properly and I want to be absolutely certain that those going to work in these areas and environments are properly looked after and properly catered for. We've seen some things in the past which hasn't thrilled me, frankly, and this is a deal, this is a compact when we do these things, where we allow people to take on that work, where there are real shortages and Australians can't do that work. They've also got to be treated properly and I will be keeping a very close eye on that.