

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Government's new visa scheme a free pass for farmers to exploit and abuse SE Asian workers

The government's new visa scheme proposal seems custom-designed to exacerbate the already rampant abuse and exploitation happening daily on Australian farms, according to the Australian Workers' Union.

The federal government has announced a new visa scheme enabling agricultural workers to be recruited from 10 South-East Asian nations. The scheme is designed to replace the flow of easily exploited workers that will be lost the system after a new free trade deal with Britain scrapped the 88-day work requirement from British working holiday visas.

Speaking on ABC RN Breakfast this morning, Agriculture Minister David Littleproud acknowledged the new Southeast Asian visa was designed to enable exploitation, by removing meagre protections in the existing Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Program.

*Fran Kelly: Why haven't we just extended [the Pacific Labour Scheme]? Why have we developed a new one for ASEAN countries?*

*David Littleproud: There are different conditions. Obviously being part of the Pacific family we were very careful to make sure they had extra conditions and protections laid on them.*

"Scott Morrison and Boris Johnson have decided it's wrong for Brits to be exposed to exploitation and abuse on Australian farms, but apparently it's okay for Southeast Asians," said AWU National Secretary Daniel Walton.

"Johnson rightly told Morrison he needed to scrap the 88-day requirement for Brits to work on Australian farms, because they were being routinely exploited and abused. They're not alone — citizens from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany, and many others have raised similar concerns. But now David Littleproud is telling Southeast Asians to come on down for the same treatment. It's shameless, stupid, and immoral.

"Mr Littleproud claims Australians 'can't be incentivised to have a crack at these jobs.' Absolute garbage. Every day Australians wake up and do much tougher and more unpleasant jobs than fruit picking. They can be incentivised to do those jobs with decent pay and conditions that protect them from abuse. If the government goes ahead with this abhorrent proposal exploitation and abuse on Australian farms will explode. And it's already so bad it warrants a Royal Commission.

"Aside from the humanity, this is also economically boneheaded. At a time when we desperately need to be putting upward pressure on Australian wages, the government decides to introduce a scheme that allows one sector to aggressively drive down the pay that should be circulating in regional economies. Much of the labour shortfall on farms could be made up quickly by providing Australian-standard wages and protections. Where there are still gaps, programs like the Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Program are much better than simply opening the gates to vulnerable Southeast Asian workers without adequate rights and protections."

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