

## **BOB KATTER**

Katter's Australian Party

**Federal Member for Kennedy**



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

27 March, 2020

### **Unemployed locals must put their shoulder to the wheel**

KENNEDY MP, Bob Katter says a critical proportion of Australia's fruit and vegetable supply is at risk unless recently unemployed North Queenslanders put their shoulder to the wheel and take up fruit picking jobs.

Mr Katter's office has been contacted by concerned farmers and representatives of the banana industry who say they won't be able to find an adequate workforce with the national borders closed to backpackers - who fill 60 per cent of fruit picking roles.

"I have never in my life advocated compulsion, but when 10 or 20 per cent of Australia's fruit and vegetable production is at risk, it's a real possibility," Mr Katter said.

"I'm sorry but everyone has to put their shoulder to the wheel. Two or three months picking work won't hurt anyone and in fact the exercise will do them a lot of good.

"The newspapers say unemployment will reach 23,000 people in Cairns and a similar number in Townsville. Well there's the answer to the farmers' concerns.

"When I was younger I worked for four or five years in unskilled labouring jobs. I did everything from repurposing television sets, working at the picture theatre, cleaning toilets and hard yakka in the mines.

"I desperately want our young people to be aspirational. I represent the aspirational classes. Most people in Kennedy are aspirational; they work in mines or the agricultural industry.

"You can't expect people to pay you when you refuse to do any work. That's not fair."

The Member for Kennedy has also written to the federal government asking them to extend the visas of backpackers who are currently working on North Queensland farms.

"We can't maintain production unless the federal government relaxes the laws on backpackers and extends their visas by three months," he said.

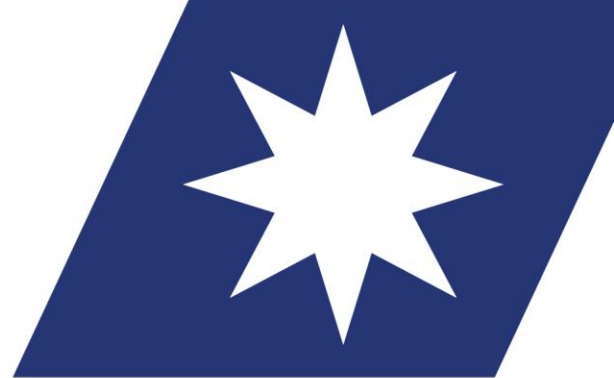
"Many of the backpackers have a month or two left at most on their visas, many are in their last week or so.

"We have sent an urgent communication to the relevant ministers."

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Bananas are still the highest selling produce item in Australian supermarkets (ref: Nielsen 2019) with a majority of supply coming from Far North Queensland.

Mr Katter said the supermarkets have been grossly irresponsible saying there is no trouble with supply.

“There will be issues with food production as we depended on backpackers for 60 per cent of our workforce.”

Mr Katter encouraged job seekers to apply for recently announced roles in mining with BHP, supermarkets, hospital work through Queensland Health and in call centres for Centrelink and Telstra.

—ENDS—

*Ref:* Bananas are still the highest selling produce item in Australian supermarkets.” (Nielsen, 2019 survey, <https://abgc.org.au/2019/08/22/bananas-still-our-favourite/>)

*Notes:*

Where jobseekers can go to get fruit picking work:

*Mackays – Tully* <http://www.mackays.com.au/contact>

*Howe Farms – Walkamin* <https://www.howefarms.com/contact-us>

<https://www.backpackerjobboard.com.au/>

<https://au.jora.com/Fruit-Picking-jobs-in-Queensland>

<https://www.workstay.com.au/fruit-picking-jobs-queensland>

Where job seekers can go to get mining work:

<https://www.bhp.com/media-and-insights/news-releases/2020/03/bhp-to-hire-1500-to-support-operations-and-the-economy/?fbclid=IwAR02pFPX6cnsGK2ISaO255ReSZz8nVuwxzIAv49wNN3fH3zVV1qZ5sd8vgw>