

THE FIRST 100 DAYS



Media Release

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Fair Work Commission's two week notice unfair for farmers

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is dismayed by the Fair Work Commission's decision to give farmers only two weeks to introduce new overtime provisions for casual horticulture workers.

"Our discussions about overtime for casual workers with the National Union of Workers and Australian Workers Union were robust but fair. In early 2017, we arrived at a decision in which neither party got everything they wanted, but was palatable to all," said Ms Emma Germano, VFF Horticulture President.

Under the new provisions, horticulture growers must pay a 15% 'night loading' for causal employees working overnight or overtime rates where the employees work more than 12 hours per day or 304 hours over eight weeks.

"It has been 18 months since the agreement was reached with the workers unions, and on Tuesday the Fair Work Commission notified the sector that it would adopt the compromise. However, the Commission has given fruit, vegetable and other horticulture producers only 14 days to understand and enact the changes. This is completely unreasonable.

"These changes are not straight forward. 14 days is simply not enough time to build appropriate tools to calculate overtime, communicate these changes to growers, and for growers to incorporate the changes.

"Wages make up the highest component of a horticulture operation's cash costs," she said. "Farmers need time to revisit their budgets, business strategy and workforce planning to assess the impact of the change and modify their plans if needed.

"We are concerned that the rush to comply could lead to mistakes and misunderstandings, resulting in non-compliance. The VFF urges the Fair Work Ombudsman to guarantee it will not prosecute farmers for accidental non-compliance for a period of 12 months after the implementation date.

"The Commission's two-week implementation period is unreasonable and shows a very poor lack of understanding of the horticulture and the administrative burden these changes will have," said Ms Germano.

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About the VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is dedicated to representing the interests of farmers and making a positive difference to their businesses and communities. We strive to create an environment for our members, our farmers, that enables profitable, safe, sustainable production to ensure an enduring social licence in a community that respects and values the sector.