

The Hon. Guy Barnett
Minister for Primary Industries and Water
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

Via email: guy.barnett@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Barnett

I am writing on behalf of Protected Cropping Australia to express our grave concerns at the impacts COVID-19 business restrictions will have on our sector, and the inevitable flow-on effects this will have on the supply of fruit and vegetables to Australian consumers.

Protected Cropping Australia (PCA) is the peak industry body representing commercial hydroponic and greenhouse growers Australia wide. PCA members also include equipment and installation suppliers, specialist consultants and advisors, researchers and educators.

The protected cropping industry is the fastest growing food-producing sector in Australia, with annual growth rates averaging more than 60% over the past five years.

In 2017/18, it was valued at around \$1.5 billion (\$1,589 million) per annum at the farm gate, up from \$486 million in 2014. This is equivalent to around 15% of the total value of vegetable and cut flower production in Australia (RIRDC report HSA-9A). However, anecdotally, it is understood that around 30% of all Australian farmers now grow crops in some form of soil-less or protected cropping system.

It is estimated that more than 10,000 people are currently employed directly in protected cropping throughout Australia, with labour requirements for the industry expanding at more than 5% per annum.

The protected cropping industry takes human health seriously and we are taking appropriate measures to ensure this is a priority. To that end, we understand and appreciate the intent behind the restrictions on business activities being implemented by governments to slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

However, it is clear that some of these measures will have unintentional consequences for our sector, potentially impeding our ability to continue to supply fresh fruit and vegetables for all Australians. Furthermore, any disruption to supply and delivery of our products will seriously impact on local employment opportunities and communities at a time when many growers are recovering from severe weather conditions and the recent devastating bushfires.

We understand that the National Farmers Federation has been given assurances by the federal government that they acknowledge that the continued provision of quality fresh produce is paramount to safeguarding the wellbeing and health of the nation.



However, this objective requires guarantees that horticulture and agriculture and the relevant food supply chains will not be interrupted, despite the closure of travel between some states.

Basic to this requirement is the fact that transport of produce from farm to market must be unobstructed across all state borders. Likewise, logistics that ensure the flow of essential agricultural inputs such as packaging, fertilisers, crop protection products and other necessary input materials must not be impeded.

We understand a list of essential services is to be developed by states. It is absolutely critical that there is consistency across states in the recognition of the importance of food production and the relevant supply chains.

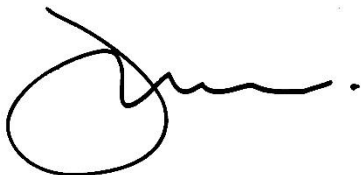
In these circumstances, it is vitally important that the states and the federal government collectively guarantee measures to control the spread of COVID-19 do not inadvertently obstruct food production and supply.

We would again stress the commitment the protected cropping sector has to playing its vital role in ensuring Australians continue to have access to the quality, fresh groceries they depend on in these uncertain and challenging times.

To that end, we urge you to immediately deem horticulture and agriculture and their related food supply chains to be essential services for the purpose of COVID-19 responses.

Your positive consideration of this request will enable our industry to keep up the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to Australian consumers. Furthermore, it will assist us in continuing to employ more people which will drive economic activity in regional communities during what will be a time of serious stress for everyone.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'J' followed by a series of connected loops and a final horizontal stroke ending in a small dot.

Jan Davis
Executive Officer
24th March 2020