



MEDIA RELEASE

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Truckie shortage threatens sugar season

THE NORTHERN sugar season is turning sour as trucks lay in idle at the Mossman Sugar mill, reeling from a mass driver shortage, Kennedy MP, Bob Katter says.

Each sugar season, cane growers race the wet season to harvest and haul their crop to the mills, but in the Mossman, Mareeba and wider Atherton Tableland region of North Queensland, the clock is ticking while truck drivers are poached to the mines in southern parts of the state.

Mr Katter said, "Critical labour shortages have now reached our cane growers and truckies. We were contacted by the head of the Mossman Sugar Mill who said they were desperate for drivers.

"We have come to the conclusion that if we aren't able to get a workforce in Australia to do these essential jobs, then we will enter into discussions with Government to get migrants in to do the jobs.

"We didn't want to do that with farming, but we were left no choice and now we have the Pacific Island Labour Scheme (PALM) in place."

Mr Katter said, "Just last week we submitted a comprehensive report detailing critical labour shortages across the electorate and provided numerous recommendations to address these shortages.

"Conversations have been held with the Minister for Employment, and will continue until we can get a fair go for our regional, rural and remote areas."

Bronwyn Dwyer, Chief Executive Officer of Far Northern Milling, says that as the operator of the Mossman Mill, they are a major employer in the region and that if they are unable to find drivers, they could face significant losses which could have dire consequences on the Mill's survivability.

"Due to the critical driver shortage and predicted wet weather conditions over the coming months, there is a high probability of standover cane, which could see 10 – 20% of the crop remaining in the paddock unharvested," Ms Dwyer said.

"Effectively, 2 years income for the growers will be lost from this cane not being harvested. Not only will this severely impact the growers' bottom line, but that cane doesn't go through the mill either and so the Mossman Mill, that's already doing it tough, loses substantial income."

"Far Northern Milling is the second largest employer in the Douglas Shire region. We have 150 full time employees during the season, and we support 570 external seasonal jobs. Finding truck drivers to get this crop off is critical not only for our industry but for prosperity of our whole community."

BOB KATTER

Katter's Australian Party

Federal Member for Kennedy

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Paul Coveny of Logitrix Management Service manages the transport and logistics of the truck fleet that hauls cane from the farms to the mill. He says he's lost two drivers in the last seven days to the lucrative mining sector.

"We need ten drivers immediately and another 30 in the coming months," Mr Coveny said.

"We are competing with the mining sector and we need urgent help to fill these empty seats. The trucks can't sit in idle for long, because once the weather sets in, that's it for the season. The clock is well and truly ticking."

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For more information or a comment from Bob Katter, please contact the media phone: 0418 840 243

