

Response to Question on Notice

Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance

Inquiry into the Impact of the Regulatory Framework for Cannabis in New South Wales

From uncorrected transcript pp. 4-5:

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of the migrant worker issue that you talked about, is it people who are assisting in the cultivation who are either here on visas or not here with visas? Is that the situation?

MICHAEL BARNES: Yes.

DARREN BENNETT: Yes. It's often what people say at the time they're sentenced that forms the information base for it, so you can take it with a grain of salt, in my opinion. There seems to be a large proportion of people who didn't know what they were doing but seemed highly skilled at doing it. They say they're manipulated and taken advantage of. My personal view is that that's probably not the case on a lot of occasions, that they full well know what they're doing. They certainly know how to operate farm machinery and very sophisticated hydroponic and indoor cultivation. But they are usually on student visas or illegal immigrants, and mainly from Vietnam.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Could I ask just about the visa issue: The visas that you're looking at are student visas, not other work visas?

DARREN BENNETT: No. There would be all types, but mainly they're illegally in Australia or on student visas. But I could get a breakdown of that.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: That would be really helpful, thank you.

The CHAIR: That has been taken on notice.

Answer:

Strike Force Heradale commenced in December 2023 to investigate the cultivation of cannabis by an organised crime network.

A total of nineteen (19) individuals (all Vietnamese born) were arrested under the Strike Force at various dates throughout 2024, including:

- Nine (9) with Bridging Visas (subclass 010) pending outcome of Permanent Protection Visa
- Four (4) Australia citizens
- Two (2) unlawfully residing in Australia
- One (1) with Bridging Visa (subclass 010) pending application for Student Visa
- One (1) with Criminal Justice Stay Visa (subclass 951)

- Two (2) with Bridging Visa (subclass 030), additional visa application unknown. These arrest figures only relate to operational activity under Strike Force Heradale.

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Approval:

Position	Signature and date
Commissioner	Mr Michael Barnes 10 January 2025