AUSTRALIAN GREENS ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

SENATOR LEE RHIANNON

1.1 The Australian Greens, an alternative voice in Parliament with the guts to stand up to the big miners, have been leading the Parliamentary charge to protect local jobs.

1.2 Labor has sat on its hands for most of this Parliament and even only a few months ago Labor was extolling the virtues of secretive Enterprise Migration Agreements (EMAs), signed at the behest of the big miners, which have the potential to undermine access by local workers to local projects.

1.3 Worse, in recent weeks we have seen an unedifying public debate about the value and impact of subclass 457 visas on society and the economy.

1.4 Important policy questions regarding the role and regulation of temporary skilled migration within the Australian labour market have been reduced to a slanging match between the old parties.

1.5 It is unfortunate to say the least that xenophobic election tactics have not only brought Pauline Hanson out of retirement but have also prevented a rational discussion about when and how overseas skilled workers should supplement the local labour force.

1.6 It is important that we not allow the dog whistle to drown out or distort the genuine and legitimate concerns that the Protecting Local Jobs (Regulating Enterprise Migration Agreements) Bill 2012 ('the bill') is seeking to address.

1.7 That is why the Australian Greens wish to thank the committee members and those who gave evidence to the inquiry for the rational and evidence based contributions and the manner in which the deliberations of the committee have been conducted. It has made an important contrast to the sometimes febrile atmosphere with which these issues are discussed.

1.8 The Committee Majority report identifies many of the problems that the bill seeks to address. These include: the lack of a role for the Employment Minister in decisions on EMAs; the need for labour market testing; legislated requirements for local jobs plans; locking in a jobs board; and putting in place transparency requirements for EMAs.

1.9 It is because the Australian Greens are in Parliament that we are seeing action on these fronts.

1.10 However, rather than support a legislative response the Committee Majority report recommends government action and strengthening of the EMA guidelines to address these problems.

1.11 While the Australian Greens welcome the support of the Senate Committee for the Greens' policy solutions – such as labour market testing including advertising – we do not accept that legislation is not required.

1.12 The Australian Greens are not confident in the government's commitment to address the problems with EMAs that we have identified and that have been confirmed by this inquiry.

1.13 The Committee's report contains no compelling argument against putting these protections in legislation.

1.14 Indeed, the Committee accepts the legitimacy of the concerns addressed by the Bill. These protections should be enshrined in law.

1.15 It is clear that Parliament must take responsibility to put in place proper regulation of EMAs.

1.16 Further, the Australian Greens would like to see many of the provisions in the bill, especially the requirement for advertising job vacancies locally, applying to all subclass 457 visas, not just those covered by EMAs.

Recommendation

1.17 While welcoming the Committee's support for the policy underlying the Australian Greens' Bill and supporting the thrust of the recommendations contained in the majority report, which mirror the provisions of the Bill, the Australian Greens believe a legislative response is required and therefore recommend the bill be passed.

Senator Lee Rhiannon