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Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration New Enquiry into the Seasonal Worker Programme By Momack Produce Pty Ltd

As an Approved Employer under the Seasonal Workers Program, Momack Produce Pty Ltd wishes to provide this submission to the inquiry. By way of background Momack Produce Pty Ltd operates in the Koo Wee Rup district which is 65 km south east of Melbourne. Our primary product is asparagus, and we have some 2500 acres under cultivation. We export a large proportion of our production to Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Korea.

The peat soils of the Koo Wee Rup district represent some of the most fertile agricultural soils in Victoria. It is an important fresh food production area of Victoria. As just one example, the District produces over 93% of Australia's asparagus, estimated at over

\$40 million annually, and is a large seasonal employer. High yield potato growing, dairying, beef production, and cropping for grain and lucerne are also major district industries. The district is at the heart of an intensive irrigated food production zone referred to as the "Casey Cardinia Food Bowl" and the "Bunyip Food Belt".

The district's agricultural productivity and the livelihood of the local community is dependent on obtaining a suitable work force for growing, picking and processing produce; of which is manual-labour intensive. Our labour needs are far more critical now than ever, and our costs of labour are high compared to our competitors, particularly Mexico and Peru, who are able to harvest in the same period. It is only our produce quality and clean and green credentials that still allows us to compete with these countries where labour is plentiful and cheaper

For many years, the shareholders of Momack Produce Pty Ltd, Motta Produce Pty Ltd and Raffa Fields Pty Ltd have been employing seasonal workers for the harvesting season and last year Raffa Fields Pty Ltd employed workers under the Seasonal Workers Programme. from the South Pacific islands (mainly from Vanuatu), paying award rates. We were delighted with their performance. In particular we noted that the workers:



- Were very reliable and willing to work hard and very adept in doing what was asked of them.
 - Were very flexible and could do a number of farm jobs
 - Were very skilled at choosing product just ready to pick and causing no damage to the crop.
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- Were cheerful and got on well between themselves and other Raffa Fields Pty Ltd employees. Their loneliness at being away from their families is somewhat compensated by the friendliness between them. While they virtually adopted us as their family while here, they are all keen to go back to their own families at the end of the season.
 - They are very law abiding and generally do not drink while in Australia, and they fit in well with the wider community

So while our costs are high, such a workforce results in higher quality and quantity harvested from our fields, and harvesting on time as spears reach their peak. This helps to keep us competitive on the world market. There are times when they cannot pick due to weather or other factors, but the workers are still paid and they make up for it by working hard and skilfully when they can pick.

We should stress that we have continued to try and recruit from the Australian labour force. We have recently advertised in local papers for 70 workers. The advertisement was vetted and approved under the recruitment plan sent to Canberra. We have only received one application in reply.

Australia needs to grow fresh food for our increasing populations, and operations such as ours contribute to the Australian market and to export markets. We need the workforce to do this, without workers we will go out of business.

The thrust of our submission is therefore to support the continuation and expansion of the Seasonal Worker Programme and to emphasise our complete dependence on such a program continuing into the future.

We thank the Committee for receiving our submission and would welcome any follow-up enquiries from the Committee, or even a visit from the committee in the harvesting season.

Yours Faithfully

Con Raffa

Director
Momack Produce Pty Ltd