



24 July 2020

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

Dear Committee Secretary

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE WORKING HOLIDAY MAKER PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Joint Standing Committee regarding the Working Holiday Maker Program.

Fruit Growers Victoria Limited (FGV) is the Victorian peak industry body for apple, pear and stone fruit growers. FGV represents and furthers the interests of more than 300 fruit growing, packing and exporting businesses across Victoria. Our members grow fruit in the Goulburn Valley (GV), Murray Valley, North East, Gippsland, Yarra Valley, Bacchus Marsh, Mornington Peninsula and Harcourt districts of Victoria. We are based in the Goulburn Valley where around 89% of pears, 49% of apples and 75% of stone fruits across Australia are produced.

FGV has been concerned for some time regarding the backpacker tax since it was introduced in 2017. FGV have been involved in various discussions with stakeholders across Victoria who share similar concerns that the tax would negatively impact the industry.

A portion of our members and growers in the region have indicated that backpackers can make up to between 50- 80% of their workforce during harvest. Backpackers ensure businesses remain sustainable and profitable due to the inability to attract local workers during peak season. The industry is working hard to address this issue, however finding local jobseekers is still a big challenge given the physical nature of the job and working in the outdoor elements.

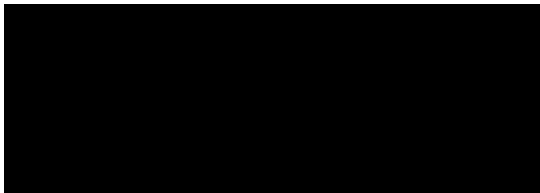
If there are not enough workers to pick fruit at the right time, there is a risk that fruit will be left to rot on the trees which will be detrimental to the industry. In addition, there is serious concern that due to current travel restrictions due to the pandemic growers will not have enough labour for the upcoming season.

Separately to the WHM visa some of the larger growers are heavily dependent on Seasonal Workers coming in from places like Vanuatu and the Pacific Islands to ensure fruit is picked in time.

The backpacker tax is a deterrent to overseas backpackers wanting to visit Australia which has previously had a very strong demand from WHM and it is impacting growers who are reporting less and less backpackers contacting them for work. Not only is this detrimental to fruit picking but to Australian tourism and visitor spending in the local economies.

We appreciate you giving us the opportunity to make a submission and we are happy to discuss this with you further.

Yours sincerely



Mitchell McNabb
Chairperson – Fruit Growers Victoria

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