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

Dear Chair,

RE: Submission to the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program

As a large fresh produce business, I write regarding the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration into the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Program.

The fresh produce (fruit and vegetable) industry is both the fastest growing and the most labor-intensive sector within Australian agriculture. Sourcing productive labour in the fresh produce industry is a significant challenge with the sector relying on temporary and seasonal migrant workers to harvest crops. Historically, it has been difficult to attract and retain a local workforce in horticulture, this has been attributed to a number of factors surrounding the nature of the work and the regional location of fresh produce production. These factors have a significant impact on the availability, quality, and retention of a highly productive workforce.

The WHM program accounts for the majority, approximately 80%, of the fresh produce industry's harvest labour workforce. These workers are important in allowing industry to manage significant workforce spikes during peak seasons and access a large number of workers that are inherently mobile (i.e. do not have fixed addresses within Australia) and are therefore able to travel to regional Australia to perform work associated with their visa conditions.

There are increasing numbers of skilled roles in fresh produce filled by Australians. These skilled roles must be underpinned by reliable seasonal harvest labour sources which to date have included predominantly WHMs, Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Facility workers. Indeed, every permanent job performed by an Australian citizen or permanent resident in the industry is dependent on 3 harvest roles, usually performed by visa holders.

The Australian fresh produce industry continues to rely upon the WHM program due to the challenges associated with attracting a large and mobile workforce to regional and rural Australia. Ongoing use of the program will be vital to the capacity of fresh produce growers to continue employing Australians, have a positive economic and social impact on regional economies and provide all Australians with fresh fruit and vegetables.

As a member of the Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA), we support and endorse the AFPA submission which provides more detailed industry information and recommendations.

Yours Sincerely,

Craig Pressler
Director 2PH Farms