

DEEP CREEK ORGANICS

PRIMARY PRODUCER & APPROVED EMPLOYER – SEASONAL WORKER PROGRAM

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New Inquiry Into The Seasonal Worker Programme

I received an invitation from you and your committee to ask for views and interest on the seasonal worker program. This is the first time I have been asked to give my thoughts on the program through Parliament questions so I will do my best to help with your inquiry.

The role of a seasonal worker in the horticulture industry.

Been a asparagus farmer myself, the never ending battle of trying to find field workers in our industry has proven to be one of our greatest battles, so much so it nearly caused the asparagus industry to close, which would be a great loss for the Koo Wee Rup region & Australian asparagus industry. We first started to use the seasonal program in the pilot 2011, it was the best move, we were not approved employers at that time, we had 3 workers come out from Vanuatu. The asparagus industry now 2015 will have 300 seasonal workers out here working on the farms, they have saved the industry.

Expanding the Seasonal Worker Programme to other Countries

All possible countries who are having trouble sourcing labour to work in any fields should be able to benefit from using the Seasonal Worker Program.

The current future workforce for the Seasonal Workers.

As I mentioned before I think the future for the horticultural industry is only going to grow in numbers for the seasonal workers, for our industry alone numbers are growing every year, farmers from all over come down during the harvest season to watch the men work.

Impact on Australian labour force & the seasonal worker program

As you are aware that we do have to place an ad for Australian & local workers before commencement of the recruiting process. After advertisement has ran for 2 weeks, & 70 available positions were posted only 4 Australian local people replied to the positions, 2 of which did not even read the description clearly outlining what was required for the job, an interview was not granted as they were no longer interested. Asparagus harvesting is not the easiest job & we do understand that people do not wish to do it, but it needs to be done & the seasonal workers do it & do it well. It's a way to earn money & send it home to their families & to help their local communities as well as their church & they are so thankful for the opportunity to work in Australia.

The merits & Challenges of increased recruitment, women & youth workers.

I think all can benefit from this program. I myself only recruit men but I would like to very much in the future to recruit women. I do source local Australian women to work in our small packing shed during the asparagus season but I would also like to give the Ni-Vanuatu women an opportunity to earn money as well, also the men are away from their families for a long period of time & I believe having women makes the men feel more at home & can bring harmony, all the accommodation would be separate of course & guidelines in place. The hardest challenge we face here is the strict building regulations we have to abide by to accommodate the workers, they are so strict & costly & complex its makes it nearly impossible for the program to continue, so many farmer(host) wish to use the program but cannot justify the cost & rules also permits for only a 16 week season.

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The role of the seasonal worker programme in supporting development assistance in the Pacific.

The way I understand this question is the money the seasonal workers earn while in Australia is taken home & put back into their villages & community to better their way of living, improving their childrens education which in its self helps the children better themselves which carries through to better jobs & opportunity. The amount of times I have travelled to Vanuatu I have seen the difference in the villages, the money earnt here has given them the chance to build concrete homes instead of tin, solar panels, tanks for fresh water, generators, power tools the list goes on. They spend money in their home Islands which helps with future development there.

The visa regime for seasonal workers, compliance and related issues

Perhaps our visa submissions could be submitted earlier than the minimum requirements of 4 week before the seasonal workers arrive in Australia would be of benefit to the recruitment process, as when a large number of seasonal workers are required in the same area on the same dates (24th August) for example, trying to get flights is proving to be a difficult & costly. As I mentioned before the Koo Wee Rup area is expecting around 300 workers from Vanuatu all around the same time, air Vanuatu has stopped all direct flights & Saturdays as well.

Related issues before the visa is granted, medical checks could perhaps include dental & tetanus injection. Many times we have had to visit the local dentist & it's a very costly process, our health cover we set up for them, dental is usually a too long of waiting period to have cover, dental is so much more affordable in Vanuatu. Tetanus is important, some hygiene & basic carefulness in these very remote Islands is very limited. When the seasonal workers come here there is so much for them to adapt to. On two occasions tetanus injection has been required & transmitted hygiene has needed attention.

Hope this information is helpful in some small way. The Seasonal Program is such an importance to our farming Industry, as approved employers we are not only grateful for the work they do on our farms but also the friendship. On our farm we fly two flags- two nations united.

Yours sincerely