

31 July 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Northline is pleased to provide this short submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport in response to comments made by Mr. Tony Sheldon at the public hearing of 26 June 2017.

Northline is a privately-owned business that is currently enjoying its 35th year of operation. We directly employ over 450 people across Australia as well as providing ongoing regular work to more than 250 subcontractor drivers, many of who are owner drivers.

Northline is committed to the ongoing employment and training of our workforce, as evidenced by the more than 2,000 hours of training undertaken across our workforce during the 2017 financial year, as well as the employment of 15 employees over the last 5 years as part of the Northline Future Leaders Program. This comprehensive graduate program provides these employees with a broad range of operational skills across all of our business units over an 18-month period.

As Mr. Sheldon correctly pointed out, Northline is proud to have moved into a number of new facilities over the last 3 years, including Darwin, Townsville and Adelaide, as well as opening our own depot in Mackay, North Queensland during September 2016. These facilities have created significant employment during the construction phase of these developments as well as ongoing employment within these capital city and regional areas. The relocation from the old facilities to new purpose built depots has provided significant and tangible safety benefits for all of our employees, subcontractors and customers. These facilities also provide much needed indirect employment opportunities for their respective local communities.



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The forklift operators that have come to Australia as part of Temporary Work (Skilled) Subclass 457 visa programme are skilled forklift operators who are already trained in how to load unpalletised general freight, which is our core business. These employees are “skills assessed” before any offer of employment is made. The employees are required to attend a recognised training facility in Australia for the sole purpose of gaining an Australian forklift licence. The skills required to load unpalletised general freight is rarely achieved by attending a two-day forklift training course.

Without addressing each statement made by Mr. Sheldon at the public hearing of 26 June 2017, Northline makes the following comments:

- Mr. Sheldon’s comments alternate between truck drivers and forklift operators. For the sake of clarity, Northline has not employed any truck drivers pursuant to the Subclass 457 visa programme.
- Mr. Sheldon implied that Northline has brought in overseas workers so that we “could pay them less”. This is not correct. As part of monitoring requirements of the Subclass 457 visa programme, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) has undertaken a review of Northline’s compliance with the terms of the programme, including a review of the wages being paid to our employees on the Subclass 457 visa programme. The DIBP wrote to Northline on 20 March 2017 advising that Northline has complied with its obligations.
- Northline agrees and acknowledges that the Transport Workers Union of Australia, New South Wales (NSW) Branch (TWU) approached our NSW depot on one occasion in July 2015 requesting that we enter in to an Enterprise Agreement with “our drivers”. We explained to the TWU representative at the time that none of our NSW drivers are employees of Northline but are subcontractors, many of who are owner-drivers.
- Mr. Sheldon asserts that Northline “had not tried very hard to recruit forklift drivers locally”. His assertion appears to be based on a review of Northline job adverts for forklift operators during January 2017. Due to seasonal factors, the month of January is our quietest operational month, and a time when our need to recruit forklift operators is low or non-existent.

Yours sincerely,

Craige Whitton
Chief Executive Officer

