

From: [Michael McMahon](#)
To: [Committee, Migration \(REPS\)](#)
Cc: [Michael McMahon](#)
Subject: Submission to Inquiry RE Seasonal Worker Programme
Date: Friday, 10 July 2015 1:14:52 PM

Dear Sir/Madam

This submission will be more brief than I would like given we are currently in the middle of our season at present.

That said, I did not want to let the opportunity go by to stress to the inquiry how valuable the Seasonal Worker Programme has been to both our business and the Seasonal Workers we have had on staff.

We have been involved in the Seasonal Worker Programme since 2011. We initially trialled the programme for 4 seasons (2011 to 2014) before becoming an Approved Employer in our own right this year. During the trial period we sourced Seasonal Workers through another Approved Employer but we treated them as our own seeing as they were living in accommodation on our property. 5 of the original 10 seasonal workers we had in 2011 are still working with us this year and are directly employed by us.

It did not take long to realise the benefits of the programme for both the Seasonal Workers and our business. This programme is truly a win-win situation for all concerned. The only reason we did not become Approved Employers in our own right after the first year is because we could not accommodate any more than 10 workers. Given it was a relatively small number we felt it was more cost effective and easier to keep employing workers through an existing Approved Employer. In 2015 we have made the decision to build more on-site accommodation for the Seasonal Workers and as such have become an Approved Employer ourselves.

Our seasonal workers fulfil a variety of labouring roles on our farm including:

- Picking fruit
- Pruning trees
- Thinning fruit – removing excess fruit from the trees during the growing season
- Labouring jobs on the farm and in the packing shed

The seasonal worker programme is now an integral part of our operation. The workers that we employ through this program are:

- Hard working, productive and motivated
- Strive to meet our expectations on the quality of their work
- Reliable (we can rely on them to be there on time for work every working day)
- Genuinely interested in the viability of our business
- Very appreciative of the opportunity to work with us in our business

Due to the necessary restrictions the Seasonal Worker programme places on guaranteed work hours, the length of stay and accommodation requirements, we cannot rely on Seasonal Workers to fill all of our field labour positions.

The Seasonal Workers do provide us with a reliable, productive base for our field labour workforce we can build on. As such we employ all suitable Australian citizens and locally based workers who

meet the necessary criteria. Backpackers also continue to be a significant and important part of our operation. Over the past few years it has become harder and harder to source reliable, productive labour from the local area and even from the backpacker contingent. I have no doubts that it is even tougher in more remote production regions.

We believe the Seasonal worker programme is fantastic in that it provides a genuine productive and cost-effective workforce solution for the horticulture industry whilst also delivering benefits to the poorer economies of our Pacific Island neighbours. All of our Seasonal Workers are so grateful for the opportunity to work with us in Australia. They tell us that they earn more money with us in 6 months than they can in 2 years at home, if they can get a job at home. They come back each year with stories of how they have improved the lives of their families and their communities and goals for what they want to do with the funds they earn in the current season.

We didn't have too much difficulty becoming an Approved Employer. The process did take a bit longer than we expected. The Department needs to be sure that they are granting Approved Employer status to genuine employers who have a good history as employers. I believe the Department is currently doing a good job on this front and has recently implemented changes in policy around contractors that are eligible to be part of the program. We need to ensure that the programme is not jeopardised by sub-standard employers and labour hire contractors.

At one point during our approval process we were impeded slightly by a quota of some description on the number of seasonal workers the hort sector could employ in a 12 month period. But fortunately, I recall this quota was eventually lifted or changed in time for our application to be approved.

This programme is critical to our business. We need to ensure it continues and we believe it will become a larger part of our business over time as our business grows and the access to reliable, productive employees locally who are willing to do manual field labouring jobs is reduced.

Please continue to support, improve and expand the programme.

Regards

Michael McMahon

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