

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Re: Inquiry into the Working Holiday VISA Program

The electorate of Grey encompasses almost all of South Australia classified as Remote or Very Remote by the ABS “Remoteness Index”. As the Member for Grey, I wish to lodge a submission calling for changes to the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Visa Program which would be of great benefit to those areas of my electorate.

I refer to the conditions within the WHM Visa Program enabling visa holders to apply for a 12 month extension to their visa if they have worked for 3 months in a specified industries, most typically agriculture, fishing and resources, in the regional and remote areas of Australia.

The visa extension is a huge attraction and provides a real incentive for these holiday workers to “go to regional Australia”. Pleasingly, the 3 month period often leads to longer periods of employment.

I have become increasingly aware of businesses in the more remote areas of my electorate who are finding it extremely difficult to attract staff, particularly in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Unfortunately positions in these sectors in Southern Australia do not qualify workers for the visa extension.

It is a frustration to employers in these areas that while WHM visas assist other remote industries to find a workforce, hospitality and tourism do not attract the same concession.

I note, the WHM visas granted for workers above the Tropic of Capricorn as per the White Paper, Developing Northern Australia, include extra qualifying industries, namely; hospitality, tourism, disability and aged care. Given the different rules for these areas are justified on the basis of “the need for development”, there is a very strong case that other remote areas of Australia should be treated the same. In the case of the electorate of Grey this includes an area covering more than 80 per cent of South Australia commonly referred to as the “Outback”.

Operating businesses in these remote parts of Australia is difficult at the best of times, but it is essential for all Australians that conditions exist in which the operators can profitably run their businesses. It is a great frustration to them, as it is to me personally, that we cannot convince young unemployed Australians into the “Outback” to take vacant positions, the pathway offers a life-changing opportunity for individuals to break the unemployment cycle.

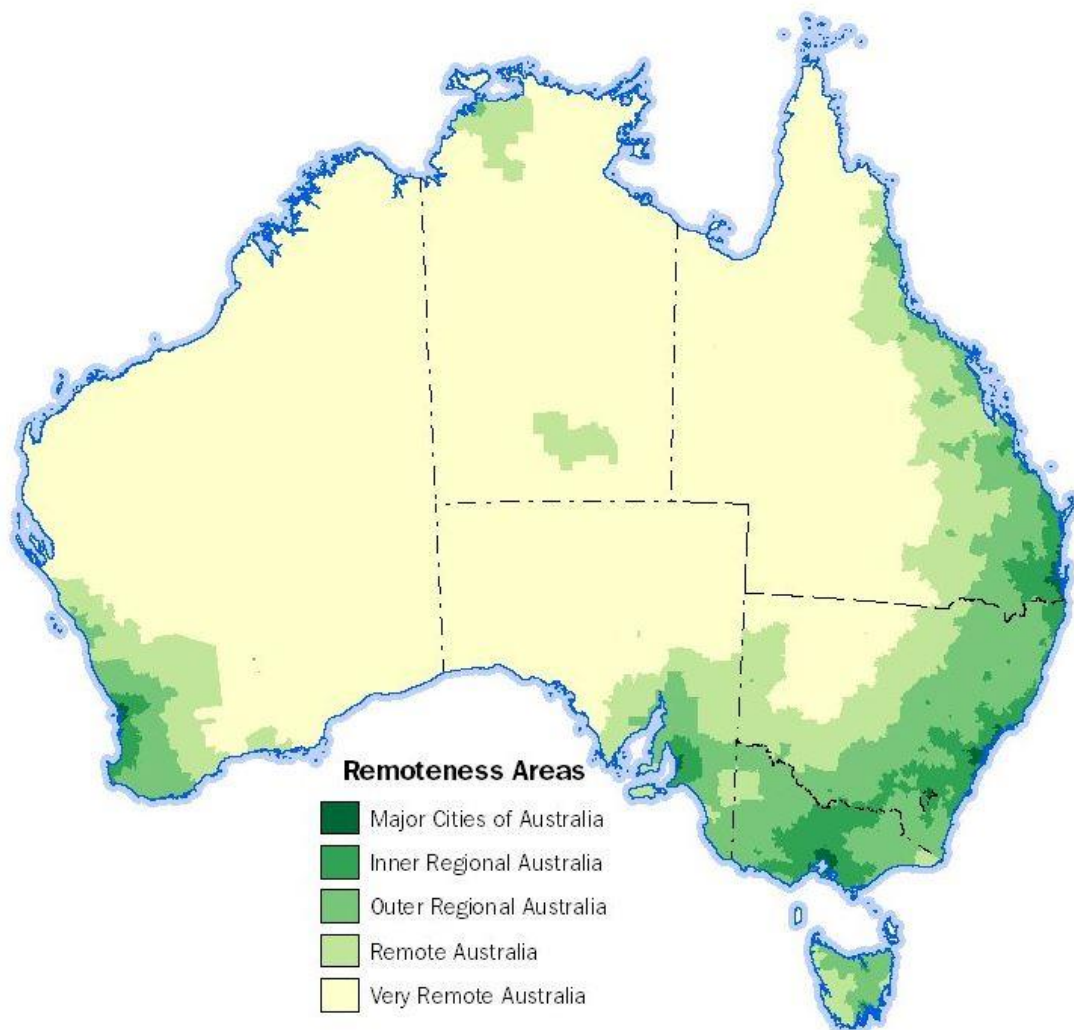
Unfortunately being committed to employing Australians, offering life-changing opportunities and being frustrated that unemployed Australians cannot be enticed into the “Outback” does not keep the doors of these businesses. We simply cannot get enough unemployed workers to even show any interest.

Not-with-standing the Covid 19 pandemic, backpackers are prepared to do so, especially where it provides an opportunity to extend their visa and on behalf of the wonderful and hardy business operators of the “Outback” I urge the committee to endorse my proposal.

I have contacted the other Members of Parliament with electorates taking in the “outback” areas of Australia south of the Tropic of Capricorn. The members for Durack, O’Connor and Parkes are strongly supportive of the rules applicable to the WHM visas in Northern Australia being extended to the remote areas of central Australia. I understand the member for Maranoa is broadly supportive with some small variation on the proposed footprint.

We have previously collectively requested the conditions applying to the WHM visa applicable above the Tropic Of Capricorn be extended to the Remote and Very Remote regions of Australia as per the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure below. Alternatively you can find it online:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure>



Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Changes would greatly assist our small business operators in remote and very remote areas who are struggling to keep their businesses fully staffed.

Rowan Ramsey

Federal Member for Grey

Friday, July 10, 2020