

Urban planning and other issues

Background

- 3.1 The committee met with officers from the Ministry for the Environment, urban designers and advisors for the Wellington City Council.
- 3.2 The committee was briefed on New Zealand's Urban Design Protocol which forms part of the Government's Sustainable Development Programme of Action (SDPA). The SDPA aims to 'ensure that [New Zealand's] towns and cities are healthy, safe and attractive places where business, social and cultural life can flourish.'¹
- 3.3 While the delegation was in New Zealand, it was also fortunate to receive an advance copy of the policy and a briefing on the Capital City Initiative.
- 3.4 While not directly related to its advisory responsibilities as a committee, the committee also met with officers of the Department of Labour and was briefed on the Recognised Seasonal Employer Program.

The Capital City Initiative

- 3.5 The Capital City Initiative (CCI) was jointly launched by the Prime Minister of New Zealand and the Mayor of Wellington on 1 September 2009. CCI has three main aims:

1 Ministry for the Environment, March 2005, *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol*, p. 2.

- elevate the status of the capital city
 - attract visitors to the city centre
 - create an infrastructure forum to tell 'the stories of New Zealand's democracy.'²
- 3.6 CCI resulted from the Wellington 2040 project which is aimed at creating a 30 plan for the central city. At the launch of CCI, the Mayor of Wellington noted:
- A capital city is recognised as the symbolic showcase of a nation, and an expression of that country's unique character. It is accepted as the right place in which to experience the heritage, culture and achievements of a country.³
- 3.7 As part of CCI, the improvement to urban design of various infrastructure in the vicinity of the Parliament has been planned to coincide with Wellington's 150th anniversary in 2015. Projects will include:
- improving areas to allow increased 'walkability'
 - improving the streetscape to reflect the importance of buildings
 - celebrating key streets such as Molesworth, Aitken and Whitmore streets
 - integration of the capital centre with the central city.⁴
- 3.8 Funding for CCI has been jointly provided by the Wellington City Council and the Government of New Zealand through the Ministry for the Environment.
- 3.9 As part of the investment for the CCI, the Wellington City Council has contributed:
- '\$3.5 million planting of pohutukawa trees on Taranaki Street to create a processional route to the National War Memorial (2010)
 - \$2.1 million revamp of the Molesworth Street area to make it a more appropriate front door to Parliament

2 Wellington City Council, Capital City Initiative, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

3 Wellington City Council, Prime Minister and Mayor Launch Project to Recognise Wellington's Capital City Status, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

4 Wellington City Council, Capital City Initiative, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

- \$1 million upgrade of the Whitmore Street area, scheduled for 2016/17.⁵
- 3.10 In addition, the Government of New Zealand is contributing to the CCI by:
- 'construction of the new Supreme Court (opened January 2010)
 - \$43 million renovation of Government House (2011)
 - a major upgrade of the National Library of New Zealand (2011/12)
 - land purchase for a national memorial park on Buckle Street.'⁶
- 3.11 Suggested projects designed to tell the stories of New Zealand's democracy may include:
- 'a visitor information centre in the Capital Centre, including a web portal
 - encouraging government institutions to have a central marketing strategy, including an open-door policy (where appropriate) to welcome visitors, provide tours and display artefacts
 - walking tours of the Capital Centre
 - better signage to explain and relate stories about each building or space
 - more events to mark historic occasions
 - a new bicultural name to reposition the Capital City in the minds of all New Zealanders.'⁷

Conclusions

- 3.12 The committee was interested to learn about the Capital City Initiative and how urban design and town planning for Wellington would be improved into the future.
- 3.13 The committee was particularly interested to discover the similarities in regard to urban planning proposals for Wellington and those included in the National Capital Plan. The committee was able to share its experience on the planning issues relevant to Canberra. In particular, the committee
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5 Wellington City Council, Capital City Initiative, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

6 Wellington City Council, Capital City Initiative, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

7 Wellington City Council, Capital City Initiative, viewed 2 June 2010, <www.wellington.govt.nz>

discussed the dual planning systems in place within the Australian Capital Territory and for the national capital.

- 3.14 The committee applauded the effort undertaken in regard to consultation to arrive at the Capital City Initiative.

Recognised Seasonal Employer Program

- 3.15 The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Program was introduced in New Zealand on 1 April 2007. The RSE Program is designed to temporarily employ overseas workers (seasonal) in the horticulture and viticulture industries to meet labour shortages which are not able to be filled by the domestic labour market.⁸
- 3.16 Under the RSE Program preference is placed on recruitment from Pacific countries. However, workers may also be recruited from outside of the Pacific if particular criteria are met, such as a pre-existing relationship between the employer and another country prior to introduction of the RSE Program.
- 3.17 New Zealand has established 'kick start' relationships for the RSE Program with 6 Pacific countries: Kiribati, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.⁹
- 3.18 There are provisions under the RSE Program which ensure that industry can benefit and its requirements are met, while also protecting the domestic labour market.¹⁰
- 3.19 Under the RSE Program, potential employers may apply for approval for recruitment of overseas workers for a period of up to 7 months each year or season. 'There is no limit to the number of times that workers can be re-employed in subsequent years/seasons.' However, the maximum number of overseas workers employed under the RSE Program is 8000 per annum.¹¹
- 3.20 The RSE Program requires potential employers to:
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8 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 1.

9 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 2.

10 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 3.

11 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 1.

- be accredited by the New Zealand Department of Labour
 - 'take all reasonable steps to recruit and train New Zealanders for available positions before seeking to recruit migrant workers'
 - pay half of the return airfare for migrant workers returning to their country of origin on completion of a contract
 - comply with New Zealand employment law which requires provision of suitable accommodation and pastoral care for workers
 - recruit workers directly.¹²
- 3.21 In 2009, approximately 7150 overseas workers were employed through the RSE Program. Of these workers, 78 percent were from Pacific countries and 22 percent were from Asia.¹³
- 3.22 Following an evaluation of the first season of the RSE Program, changes to the Program were made which included:
- allowing recruitment from outside the Pacific for those employers who have a pre-established recruitment relationship after April 2007
 - aligning wage deductions with the Wages Protection Act 1983 to ensure deductions meet minimum legal standards
 - reducing compliance and improving access to the RSE Program for employers
 - requiring employers to arrange health insurance for workers.¹⁴
- 3.23 Continuing issues in regard to the RSE Program are:
- responding to the current economic conditions and domestic labour market mix
 - managing worker behaviour issues
 - 'responding to unsatisfactory performance by accredited employers'
 - review of the Department of Labour's role in delivery of the RSE Program during the maturation phase of the program
 - 'operating effectively under budget and cost pressure'
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12 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 1.

13 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 1.

14 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 4.

- establishing and maintaining effective industry networks and relationships at the national and regional levels.¹⁵

Conclusions

- 3.24 The committee discussed various issues surrounding implementation and operation of the RSE Program, including the improvement phase of the program following its first evaluation.
- 3.25 The committee was also able to gain an appreciation of how such a program has the added benefit of strengthening New Zealand's relationship with Pacific nation countries and assisting in fulfilling New Zealand's role in promoting a regional approach to the Pacific.

Senator Kate Lundy
Chair and Delegation Leader
16 June 2010

15 Department of Labour, Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy: The New Zealand Experience, p. 5.