

3 June 2010

The Committee Secretariat,

Parliament of Australia

**Re: Submission - an enquiry on how government employment policies can address skills shortages in regional Australia.**

I am a migrant who lived and worked in regional Australia with my family and wish to share some of my positive experiences for the benefit of this enquiry. During this time I had the opportunity to consult with many growers and employers in Victoria, NSW and SA. This is when I realized how deep the skills shortage problem was in our industry. This gave me a passion to deliver high quality training for this industry by establishing a RTO.

We believe that the relocation of unemployed workers from our major cities can easily be fixed through government's sound, thoughtful and realistic employment policies.

We also believe that workable opportunities can be created to support the relocation of unemployed workers from areas of high unemployment in our cities to areas experiencing chronic skills shortages in regional and remote Australia.

We definitely agree with the views of National Farmers Federation that participation programs will achieve nothing unless more is done by government not only in relocating the people but providing incentives to keep them in regional areas on a long-term basis. We believe in outcomes leading to finding a long-term solution to overcome this very serious problem, part of which have been built up over years of bad policies of previous governments. However, we are pleased that something is happening now to address this critical issue facing our country.

**Target groups:**

The target groups for domestic relocation should be carefully defined and comprise of all newly arrived migrants, unemployed people, refugees, displaced people who have lost their jobs and people on dole and centre link benefits.

**Skilling of the people:**

The need for this must be fully understood and properly addressed otherwise the policies alone will achieve nothing. Prior to relocation, opportunities must be provided for all to be properly trained, skilled and become job ready for employment in regional areas otherwise they will quickly head back to the cities again.

### **Definition of rural and regional areas:**

These areas should be clearly defined and must not include capital cities of any state and territories. Migrants on arrival must only be allowed to settle in regional and remote areas.

Australian General Skilled Migration Program must provide incentives for people to settle in regional and remote Australia through the allocation of additional bonus points for settling and working in regional areas as follows:

- 2 years employment in regional areas 5 points
- 3 years employment in regional areas 10 points
- 4 years employment in regional areas 15 points
- 5 years employment in regional areas 20 points
- 6 years employment in regional areas 25 points

### **Creating incentives to buy house and land in regional areas:**

This will encourage people to choose life on the land and move to the regional and remote areas. Benefits should include doubling of home owner grants to everyone who may wish to relocate to regional areas, providing free education for school aged children, no fees for doctor consultation and concession for use of public transport.

### **Education of careers teachers in schools:**

It is sad to know how little our careers know about life on the land and opportunities for employment in regional areas. This is why students choosing courses and careers never know the benefits of studying agriculture, horticulture and forestry related occupations.

The current SOL List is a disaster as it does not include any occupations in agriculture, horticulture and forestry occupations. Because of this, we will never see motivated young people willing to undertake studies for employment and careers on the land in regional areas.

Yet the occupations accountants and motor mechanics appear on the SOL List. Both these occupations have limited employment opportunities in regional areas. Through this anomaly government policy is encouraging people to live in our major cities and metropolitan areas.

### **Settlement of new migrants:**

All new migrants must be required to serve in regional and remote areas for a minimum of 2 years – this should be the condition on which all Australian permanent residency should be granted. This policy will provide a real solution to rural / regional skills and labour shortages. The policy should encourage settlement of people in regional areas away from capital cities of our states and territories.

### **Multicultural Australia:**

Life on the land through employment incentives in regional areas would provide opportunities for new migrants and refugees to understand Australian culture and the way of life, encouraging quick assimilation and contributing towards development of better Australia. The current policy tends to encourage building of Gatos adding to racial tension, violence and increased crimes.

Through this policy change Australia will surely become the envy of the world where the entire world would be able to see how people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds work and live together. This will show a positive image of Australia – a free country where people of different backgrounds live, work together and maximize their true potential.

### **Illegal workers:**

A significant number of employers across these industries still employ illegal workers available to them through contractors. This practice must be stopped as it becomes a disincentive for workers seeking permanent long-term employment in regional areas. For various reasons employers give priority to these groups, particularly during seasonal demands for harvest labour.

### **Backpackers and holiday makers:**

The policy should not allow this to continue as many employers often employ these people before considering local people.

### **Guest worker program:**

There is no long-term benefit of this program to the Australian agriculture, horticulture and forestry industries. Because of this program some employers are very reluctant to invest in training of their staff – this kills the opportunity for local people to take jobs in rural / regional areas and will not be in the interest of the proposed domestic relocation.

### **Education and Training:**

The policy must encourage and support the delivery of high quality training regardless of where and who delivers the training. Achievement of quality outcome through well developed, skilled and employable graduates must be the bottom-line of all training for our industry. Anything less will severely compromise the quality of our education and training leading to production of unemployable graduates.

The policy must also encourage establishment of real pathways between VET and Higher Education Providers, only then high quality employable graduates can be developed for our industry.

Currently it is near impossible to establish pathways with universities. Alternatively, high quality training providers (RTO'S) for our industry should be granted higher education provider status.

This will definitely enhance the delivery of high quality training for our industry encouraging relocation of people into regional areas.

We would appreciate if you would bring the above to the kind attention of House Employment Committee for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Ram Gopal