

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2013-2014**

Outcome 3 - Employment

DEEWR Question No. EW0128_14

Senator McKenzie asked on 4 June 2013, Hansard pages 36-37

Question

Seasonal Worker Program

Senator McKENZIE: I want to turn to migration and the Seasonal Workers Program. I would like to know how many producers accessed the program over the last 11 months. Mr Roddam: I am not sure I can tell you how many. What I can tell you is that we have 36 approved employers operating under the program. I noticed you used the word 'producers'. Some of those are accommodation businesses. With the expansion of the program into some trial industries, that would include those industries as well. I do not have the figure for how many of those have actually recruited workers into the country over this year, but that is the number of employers who are approved to participate in the scheme.

[a] Senator McKENZIE: So we have 36 approved employers under the program. Can you separate out, then, those that are part of the new pilot program and the ones that are actually in the more formal program of those 36? Mr Roddam: We would have to take that on notice.

[b] Senator McKENZIE: With the 36 approved employers, how many employees? Mr Roddam: How many workers have come under the program? Senator McKENZIE: Yes. Mr Roddam: As at 30 April there have been 1,015 since the program commenced on 1 July. Senator McKENZIE: Have all of those stayed for their period of contract between the 14 weeks or the six months? Mr Roddam: Yes, they would have. Are you asking if anyone has overstayed the visa? Senator McKENZIE: No; I am asking if anybody left early. Mr Roddam: I would need to take that on notice.

[c] Senator McKENZIE: How much does each approved employer contribute? Mr Roddam: There is not a defined amount of money they would contribute. It is a cost-sharing arrangement in terms of the way the program operates. They pay for a certain proportion of the worker's airfare, health insurance and those sorts of things. I would be able to provide that in detail on notice. Senator McKENZIE: Could you outline the detail for that? Thank you. Mr Roddam: Certainly.

[d] Senator McKENZIE: When you are doing the breakdown of those figures, could you do also the returning workforce? Mr Roddam: We can do. There will not have been any workers return under the program, but there would have been workers who participated in the pilot scheme who have now returned for the program. We would be able to provide that for you. Senator McKENZIE: I look forward to those answers to questions on notice.

Answer

(a) At 30 September 2013, 40 employers are approved to participate in the Seasonal Worker Program. Thirty two of them are participating only in the ongoing program in horticulture. Three of them are participating only in the three year trial of seasonal labour mobility arrangements in the accommodation, aquaculture, cane and cotton sectors. One approved employer is participating in both the ongoing program and the three year trial. Four approved employers are yet to commence a recruitment process under the Seasonal Worker Program.

(b) The Department of Immigration and Border Protection advise that at 30 September 2013, 1740 visas have been granted to seasonal workers to come to Australia under the Seasonal Worker Program.

Through discussions with employers, the Department of Employment is aware that a small number of seasonal workers will return home early.

The reasons why a seasonal worker may return home early vary. They include to care for sick or dying relatives in their home country, the termination of their employment and a reduction in the amount of work available in Australia due to adverse weather events.

(c) Approved Employers pay for:

- the return international airfare upfront and they can deduct the amount of \$500 from the seasonal workers' pay in accordance with an agreed deduction schedule;
- the internal transfer costs from the port of arrival into Australia to the place of work, and back to the port of departure at the conclusion of the seasonal workers' stay and they can deduct up to \$100 from the seasonal workers' pay in accordance with an agreed deduction schedule.

Health insurance, accommodation and transport to and from work are organised by the Approved Employer and paid for by seasonal workers.

(d) At 30 September 2013, 761 of the 2338 seasonal workers who have been granted a visa to come to Australia under the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme and Seasonal Worker Program have returned for a second or further season.