

Question: There have already been some comments in the submissions around the cost of workers compensation and the requirements for approved employers around that. Are the rates applied to calculate the premiums appropriate for seasonal workers, do you think?

It is our understanding that workers compensation is the responsibility of state and territory governments and the calculation of premiums differs in each state. However, the general process of calculating the premiums is based on various factors including the amount of wages paid to workers and the cost of any claims made by workers. We note the comments made in submissions on this issue. This may be an indication that the harmonisation of workers compensation arrangements across the Commonwealth, States and Territories is an important issue and should be revived as a priority. There may be some scope for a system that takes into account the individual needs of particular categories of workers.

Question: Are you aware of how many of your members are approved employers under the Programme? Have you received any feedback on the application and approval process to become an approved employer?

Our understanding is that none of the current approved employers under the Program are NFF members. However, farmers within the NFF membership have used the services of an approved employer to find workers under the Program.

Question: Do you have any suggestions on enticing growers to switch from other forms of labour supply to the Programme?

In our view, increasing uptake in the Program requires a clear business case to demonstrate to the agriculture sector that investment in the Program makes economic sense. This requires data and analysis to underpin a targeted community awareness campaign supported by industry in partnership with approved employers and government.

The proposed World Bank Seasonal Worker Program Labour Efficiency Study has potential to fill the current gap in data and information about the benefits of the program. This study involves assessing information from Approved Employers to determine the costs and benefits of the program, both qualitative and quantitative. This information will help industry make the case to employers about the benefits of engaging with the program.

Increased promotion directly to growers is important. This should utilise a variety of avenues to ensure that the message is distributed to farmers given the information barriers that some farmers in rural and remote areas face. For greatest impact, this should include direct, on the ground contact through workshops and regional visits designed to promote the Program and its benefits.

Question: What mechanisms could employers put in place to attract more local workers

The NFF is currently exploring the use of digital tools to better match labour supply and demand in regional and rural areas. Employers and the job opportunities they offer need to be more visible to local workers so that they are encouraged to seek employment.

Question: The Development Policy Centre has recommended the creation of a seasonal worker programme employer support group. Do you have a view on this recommendation?

The NFF is supportive of an initiative that connects employers and provides an avenue for information exchange and discussing and addressing the issues facing employers under the scheme. Past forums that have been held for approved employers under the scheme have facilitated valuable information exchange between approved employers.