

# Inquiry into the Seasonal Worker Program

## A Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

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<sup>1</sup> This submission represents the views of the authors, and are not the views of The Australian National University

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Established in 1996 and funded in partnership by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australian National University (ANU), the ***State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*** (SSGM) Program is the leading international centre for applied multidisciplinary research and analysis concerning contemporary governance issues in Melanesia and the broader Pacific. Situated within the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, SSGM seeks to set the international standard for scholarship on the region.

SSGM undertakes policy-relevant research and broader analytical work in order to establish an evidence-based knowledge platform to underpin better informed policy-making, and to provide expertise on a broad range of strategic foreign, economic, trade and development issues in the Pacific. It seeks to train and nurture the next generation of Pacific scholars; support the development of a cadre of scholars, practitioners and regional leaders; communicate research findings to the policy community; and foster regional partnerships and deepen community awareness of Pacific policy issues.

**SSGM's labour mobility research agenda**

SSGM welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Australian Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration, relating to the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP).

In 2015, SSGM scholars commenced a program of research on labour mobility, with a particular focus on seasonal worker programs in the region. Since the establishment of Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and New Zealand's Regional Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) a number of evaluations and studies have shown overall positive effects for Pacific families and communities participating in the schemes (Bailey 2013; Gibson and McKenzie 2010; Gibson and McKenzie 2011). Evidence has shown that incomes from seasonal labour mobility have provided capital for the establishment of micro businesses in the Pacific, and enabled new employment opportunities for those who do not participate in labour mobility. SSGM's research is addressing the impacts of participation in the regional seasonal worker programs in Australia and the Pacific, including how remittances from labour schemes are spent, and the impediments to participation in seasonal worker programs. To date, SSGM's labour mobility research has been published and presented in a range of academic and policy-focussed fora.

SSGM's research on labour mobility benefits from the diverse academic and professional backgrounds of its scholars working on a range of issues associated with labour mobility. We also work closely with colleagues from the World Bank, other parts of the University, Australian Government Departments, and with counterparts in New Zealand to promote the relevance and complementarity of our research.

The following SSGM scholars are among those working on labour mobility issues:

- **Rochelle Bailey** is a Research Fellow who has for the past eight years been examining the cultural, economic, political, and social impacts of the RSE and SWP labour mobility schemes for employers, Pacific seasonal workers, and communities in host and sending regions.
- **Rochelle Ball** is a Fellow with over twenty years' research policy experience in labour mobility studies in South East Asia and the Pacific. As a senior labour mobility specialist she has worked as a consultant to a range of multilateral agencies, Australian government departments and Australian agricultural industry bodies.
- **Priya Chatter** is a Research Fellow and is leading the qualitative component of the World Bank's Impact Evaluation of the SWP in Tonga and Vanuatu. She is responsible for writing the gender report. **George Carter** and Rochelle Bailey are working as research enumerators for the World Bank's Impact Evaluation of Australia's Seasonal Worker Program.
- **Roannie Ng Shiu** a Research Fellow developed the first cultural awareness training package for the pilot of the SWP and has worked and published collaboratively with Rochelle Bailey on a number of Pacific labour mobility issues, including examining migration and climate change.

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## 1. The role of seasonal workers in the horticulture industry.

The OECD's recently issued report, *The Future of Productivity* (2015), identifies population ageing and its impacts on labour force participation across the OECD as a key challenge to global growth. It identifies international labour mobility as a critical factor maintaining productivity in the OECD. Australia's SWP addresses labour shortages resulting from Australia's ageing labour force and upskilling, and strengthens regional relations (Ball 2015a).

Research conducted both in Australia and New Zealand indicates that Pacific seasonal workers provide a valuable labour source where there are verifiable shortages. Pacific seasonal worker programs facilitate labour supply that suits growers' expectations and demands. They are a captive, immobile (cannot change employers, therefore bound to an employer by contract and visa), organised and reliable work force that ensures growers will have crops harvested on time. Gibson and McKenzie (2014: 19) argue that "RSE workers are 50-60% more productive than backpackers and New Zealand casual labour, and 11-18% more productive than other New Zealand contract workers, even those returning for multiple seasons." Table 1 provides the numbers of Pacific workers by country since the beginning of the SWP in 2012. Between 2012-13 and 2014-15, 6,288 workers were employed under the SWP. The SWP has been dominated by Tonga at the outset. However, the participation of Vanuatu and Timor Leste in the SWP has doubled between 2013-14 and 2014-15. Industry expectations are that Fijian and Samoan participation will also grow substantially. The participation of PNG and Solomon Islands is notable given they have the biggest populations in the Pacific, but are the poorest participants relative to their population size.

Map 1 shows that current demand for the SWP is greatest in Queensland, NSW and Victoria. There is also a clear demand clustered in southern Western Australia. Patterns of labour market segmentation by crop type and nationality of workers are emerging but are yet to be examined. The labour mobility program is expanding following positive farmer experience. Typically when employers benefit from returning workers, they increase the numbers of workers and, for the most part, bring those workers from the same country. This has led to concentration of workers from particular Pacific nations working in certain horticulture sub-sectors. For example, Vanuatu dominates the asparagus industry; Tonga dominates the citrus and almond growing industries.

Visa statistics indicate that demand for Pacific seasonal workers is growing in horticulture. In 2013-14, 98.9% of visas available for horticulture were taken up, and 81% of all visas available (including the trial sectors) were absorbed: an increase of 6% on the previous year. In terms of the trial sectors in 2013-14, there has been poor up-take with just 35 of 500 places filled (Roddam 2014).

**Table 1: Pacific Island Country Participation in the SWP**

Country	RSE (NZ) 2013/14	SWP 2013/14	SWP 2014- May 2015
Fiji	N/A	N/A	4
Kiribati	127	14	11
Nauru	N/A	0	0
Papua New Guinea	58	26	35
Samoa	1,169	162	175
Solomon Islands	491	9	21
Timor Leste	N/A	74	168
Tonga	1,538	1,497	1,883
Tuvalu	71	20	7
Vanuatu	3,070	212	497
TOTAL	6,524	2,014	2,801
<b>Source:</b> Unpublished Statistics from: Dept. of Employment (2015a); NZ Immigration (2014)			

**Map 1: Destinations of Seasonal Workers**



Source: Department of Employment (2015a)

### *Productivity impacts of the SWP*

Research conducted by ABARES (2013), while clearly limited by the poor representativeness of its sample (one farm), provides evidence of productivity gains under the SWP. Some key findings were:

- SWP workers were, on average, significantly more efficient than working holiday makers (WHM). Seasonal workers earned an average 22% more than WHM.
- Returning SWP workers were more productive earning \$2.80/hour (12%) more than new SWP workers.
- This grower halved the number of workers required to pick the same amount of fruit over 5 year period.

Despite research sample limitations, the findings from the ABARES study resonated with the New Zealand experience where substantial increases in productivity from returning Pacific seasonal workers in horticulture and viticulture have been documented (Bedford and Bedford. 2011; 2013). Based on piece rate earnings of 583 workers over 10 weeks (which compared Pacific recruits, NZ regular employees, NZ casuals, backpackers), they found that RSE workers are more productive on all indicators. Some key findings were:

- RSE are more reliable than backpackers (9.97 weeks worked out of ten compared to seven weeks for the non-RSE average)
- RSE workers are more productive. The average piece rate earnings of non RSE workers were 60% lower: \$6890 (RSE) compared \$4163 (non RSE).
- Productivity of RSE workers continued to increase in 2nd and subsequent seasons.

Australian productivity gains from labour mobility could be substantial, particularly under an expanded program. Documenting these gains will be key for marketing the program to farmers and assessing the productivity gains from the policy.

### *Illegal Labour Supply*

Backpacker labour and some illegal labour activities reduce the demand for workers under the SWP in Australian horticulture, and is a site of [worker abuse and exploitation](#) (ABC 2015; Ball, 2010, 2011, 2015a; Ball 2015a). The SWP is in competition with illegal foreign labour supply. A recent World Bank discussion paper (2015) showed that in 2013-14 there were 17,185 unlawful non-citizens located. Nonetheless, as Doyle and Howes (2015: 14) acknowledge, “There is no reliable estimate of the number of undocumented workers in the horticulture sector”. Therefore, this number is likely to be significantly higher. Encouraging Australian employers to shift their labour hire practises (such as the use of illegal labour hire contractors) will require a stronger “carrot and stick” approach.

### *Conclusions*

The SWP provides an opportunity to fill labour gaps in the agricultural industry and boost productivity. In New Zealand, prior to the establishing their RSE, regulations on labour in the sector were tightened; this opened up additional work opportunities for those legitimately in the sector.



Australia could benefit from a similar regulatory program. Ensuring that the SWP expands safely will require ongoing oversight from the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) to maintain the integrity of the program (Ball 2015a,b).

This submission recommends that:

- Comprehensive productivity research under the SWP be conducted to demonstrate productivity gains that the SWP will likely offer.
- The FWO enforces agricultural employer compliance with *The Fair Work Act* (2009), relevant modern awards and visa conditions, to both improve industry employment standards and to open up more opportunities for legitimate workers.
- The FWO is well resourced to provide comprehensive oversight of employment conditions for SWP workers.

## 2. Expanding the Seasonal Worker Programme to other countries and sectors.

The Australian Government's recent announcement of the significant expansion of the SWP in *the Northern Australian White Paper* is a game changing initiative. Some key features of this announcement are:

- Removed the annual limit on the number of seasonal workers who can participate in the programme. There are now no restrictions on number of seasonal workers that Australian employers can recruit each year.
- Expanded it to all of the agriculture industry;
- Rolled over trials in the aquaculture, cane and cotton industries into ongoing programme within the broader agriculture industry;
- Trials in the accommodation industry became an ongoing programme in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Tropical North Queensland and Kangaroo Island for specified occupations;
- Established a trial in the Tourism sector within Northern Australia;
- Will extend the SWP to an additional five partner countries upon conclusion of PACER Plus;
- Removal of the minimum 14-week duration of employment in Australia providing sufficient net financial benefit is met for workers

This submission recommends that the:

- SWP should be well established and stabilised in the agriculture sector before ongoing and further expansion into other industry sectors such as tourism, and the establishment of further trial industries and sectors.
- The appropriate areas of the Department of Employment and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade be sufficiently well resourced to facilitate the efficient expansion of the SWP for both Australia, Australian industry and partner Pacific nations.

Prior to the Australian Government's announcement of the expansion of SWP in July 2015, the program offered places to 10 nations. Only three of those 10 countries (Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) sent more than 100 workers in the 2014-15 (Chattier 2015). Maximising the benefits of the program will require additional capacity building to support the establishment of safe and efficient recruitment processes, in-country.

This submission recommends that:

- More time and investment be spent on building capacity for Pacific states to supply labour under the expanded SWP. In particular, it recommends targeted resourcing be provided for existing low participating countries before access to the SWP expansion opportunities are offered to more island states.
- That the impacts of the removal of the minimum employment period be closely monitored to ensure that these policy changes do not negatively impact the development objectives and outcomes of the SWP.

Following broader experience of other developing country labour exporters (Ball 2006, 2008, 2013) it is likely that irregularities in recruitment practises from PICs will increase as employment opportunities in Australia expand under the SWP.

This submission recommends that:

- Australian government funded Pacific capacity building under the Labour Mobility Assistance Program, work closely with sending States to develop safe, well regulated pro-poor recruitment processes and monitoring systems.

### 3. The current and projected future workforce requirements for sectors that may benefit from seasonal workers.

This question requires considerable research to provide adequate answers, and is the subject of research in progress, by SSGM scholars. It is also an area that the World Bank will undertake work in under the broader *Pacific Possible Project*. The following response provides a summary of key findings of soon to be released work for the Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (Ball 2015 forthcoming) which examines both labour market gaps and identifies Pacific skills development needs to address future employment opportunities.

Like many OECD countries, Australia faces the challenge of an ageing population and labour market (Deloitte Australia, 2011). With declining fertility and an ageing population, it is likely that Australia will look increasingly to a range of international labour sources to maintain its workforce to sustain economic growth and national service provision.

Temporary and permanent employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders in Australia would be best strategically linked to the growth sectors of the Australian economy. Deloitte Access Economics (DAE 2013) have identified five super growth industry sectors for the Australian economy over the next twenty years which offer high growth rates and Australian advantage are:

- *“Agribusiness:* Global population growth of 60 million per year will increase food demand, with Asia’s growing middle classes set to boost their protein intake.
- *Gas:* Rapid growth in emerging economies has polluted the air in the major cities to our north. That will underwrite demand for gas, a cleaner and greener alternative.
- *Tourism:* This sector is set to double in size in the next 20 years, with Asia’s expanding middle classes fueling the growth.
- *International education:* Foreign students are already our fourth biggest export earner; with India and China likely to drive great growth in demand in the sector.
- *Wealth management:* Three billion people in Asia will join the middle class by 2030 and by 2050 the region will account for more than half the world’s financial assets (DAE 2013:1)”.

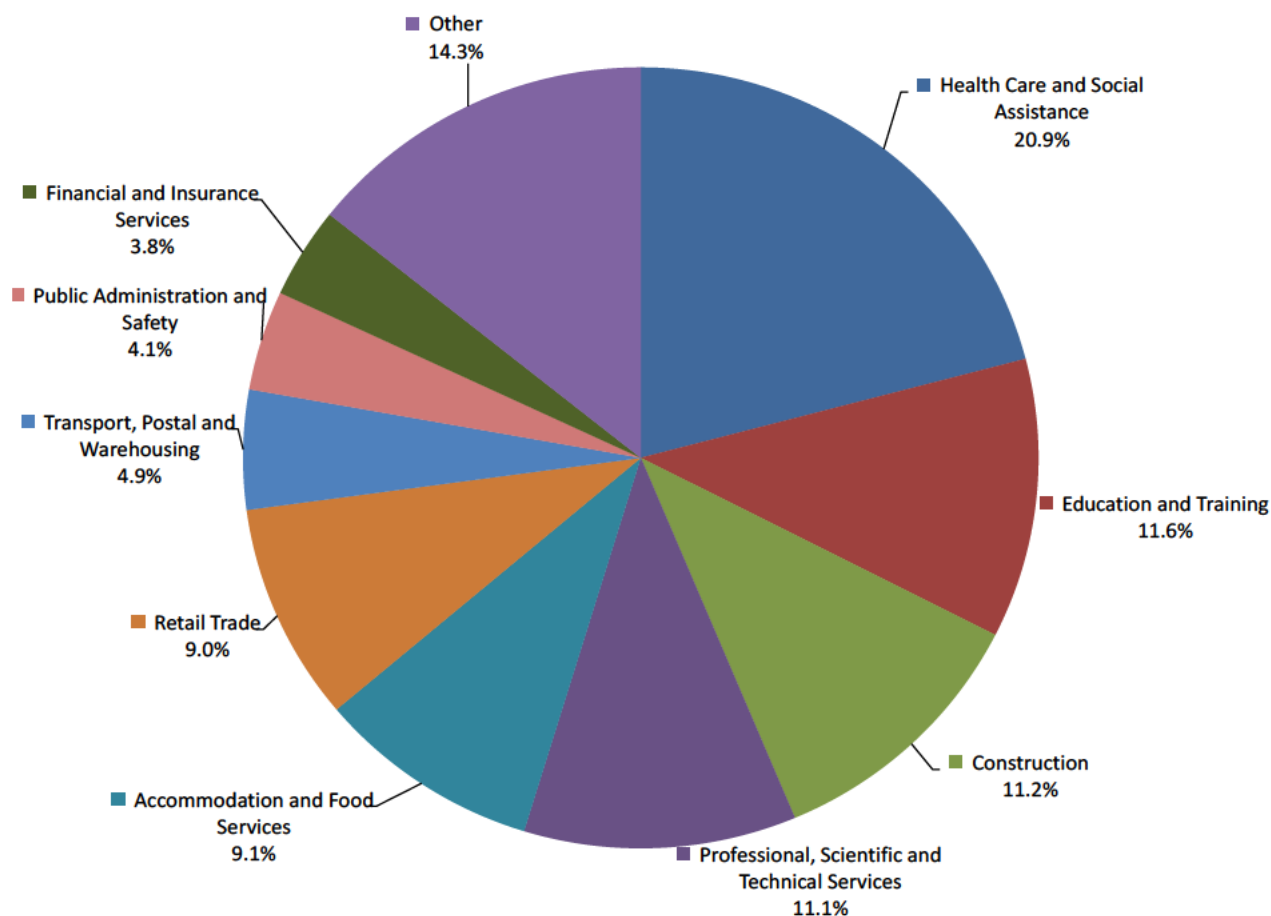
This submission focuses on two of these sectors: agribusiness and tourism. It discusses one additional sector: the health and care giving industry, where there is the potential for labour force and skills complementarity with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in the medium to longer term.

#### *Where are the Projected Employment Growth Industries?*

In March 2015, the Department of Employment (DoE) released its *Industry Employment Projections Report* which projects employment demand for the next five years for the 19 key industry sectors. The DoE projects total employment to increase by 1,166,400 (or 10.0 per cent) over the five years to November 2019 (DoE, 2015a). As key points DoE (2015b:3) projected that:

- “Full-time employment is projected to make the largest contribution to employment growth over the period (up by 669,000 or 8.3 per cent), although part-time employment is projected to increase at a faster rate (up by 494,400 or 14.0 per cent).

- Employment among males is projected to increase by 622,700 (or 9.9 per cent) over the five years to November 2019, while female employment is projected to rise by 543,800 (or 10.2 per cent).
- Employment is projected to increase in 17 of the 19 broad industries over the five years to November 2019. Declines in employment are projected only for the Mining and Manufacturing industries. As indicated by both Figure 4 and Table 4, the Health Care and Social Assistance is projected to make the largest contribution to employment growth (increasing by 258,000), followed by Education and Training (142,700), Construction (137,900) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (136,600). Together, these four industries are projected to provide more than half of total employment growth over the five years to November 2019” (DoE, 2015b:3).



**Figure 1: Share of Projected Employment Growth by Industry: Five Years to November 2019. (Source: DoE, 2015b).**

Table 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of projected industry growth (or declines) than provided in Figure 1. For example, while the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is projected to increase by 3.7% (12,000), it is within this sector that the SWP predominately resides, due to both the combined demand for seasonal and low skill labour.

**Table 2: Department of Employment Industry Projections: 2014- 2019**

Industry	Projected employment growth – five years to November 2019	
	('000)	(%)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	12.0	3.7
Mining	-40.7	-17.8
Manufacturing	-26.2	-2.9
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	5.4	3.8
Construction	137.9	13.0
Wholesale Trade	24.8	6.3
Retail Trade	111.1	8.9
Accommodation and Food Services	112.4	13.9
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	61.0	10.2
Information Media and Telecommunications	8.6	4.0
Financial and Insurance Services	46.4	11.3
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	27.8	12.6
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	136.6	14.4
Administrative and Support Services	30.5	8.0
Public Administration and Safety	51.0	7.0
Education and Training	142.7	15.6
Health Care and Social Assistance	258.0	18.7
Arts and Recreation Services	31.3	13.8
Other Services	36.0	7.6
<b>All Industries</b>	<b>1166.4</b>	<b>10.0</b>

Source: Department of Employment (2015b)

### *Projected Skills Employment Growth*

DOE projections to year end of 2019 reveals increased anticipated demand across all five skill levels of 10% (Table 3). Projected demand is dominated by Skill Levels 1 and 2 for workers possessing a Bachelor degree or higher qualification (Skill Level 1) or Advanced Diploma or Diploma (Skill Level 2). However, it is important to note that it is anticipated that there will remain substantial demand for workers at the lower skills levels (Skill Level 4 and 5), which are commensurate with Certificate II or III; and Certificate 1 or secondary education, respectively. These projections indicate that even lower skills training by PICs for targeted labour markets could provide an entry point into Australia's labour market.

**Table 3: Projected Australian Skills Demand: 2014-2019**

Skill Level	Employment Level - November 2014 ('000)	Department of Employment Projections		
		Projected employment level - November 2019 ('000)	Projected employment growth - five years to November 2019	
			('000)	(%)
<b>Skill Level 1</b>	3550.0	4016.6	466.7	13.1
<b>Skill Level 2</b>	1313.2	1449.6	136.4	10.4
<b>Skill Level 3</b>	1776.8	1923.9	147.1	8.3
<b>Skill Level 4</b>	3020.4	3319.4	299.0	9.9
<b>Skill Level 5</b>	1953.5	2070.7	117.2	6.0
<b>Total</b>	11,613.9	12,780.3	1166.4	10.0
Skill Level 1 is commensurate with a Bachelor degree or higher qualification				
Skill Level 2 is commensurate with an Advanced Diploma or Diploma				
Skill Level 3 is commensurate with a Certificate IV or III (including at least 2 years on-the-job training)				
Skill Level 4 is commensurate with a Certificate II or III				
Skill Level 5 is commensurate with a Certificate I or secondary education				

Source: Department of Employment (2015c)

### ***Key Industry Sectors***

The following discussion is based on the identification of key labour demand growth sectors in the Australian economy that provide potential employment opportunities for PICS. As such, it does not address all industry sectors. The key industries discussed are: the agrifood industry; tourism; and health and social assistance.

#### **The Agrifood Industry**

The Australian agrifood industry is the lowest skilled, most rapidly ageing industry. As at May 2014, 56.4 per cent of the industry's workforce was aged 45 years and over. The age profile is significantly higher than across all industries (39.1 per cent) (Department of Employment 2014). Employment in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is highly variable due to a range of factors, which include industry susceptibility to climatic variations such as drought, floods and global shifts in demand for agricultural commodities. For example, between May 2013 and May 2014 employment fluctuated by 11.4% from 292,400 to 325,800 workers employed in this industry (DoE 2014b:1). Thus, industry demand for Pacific SWP workers is likely to exhibit significant variability.

This industry is also characterised by substantial weighting towards lower skilled occupations in agriculture. DoE (2014b:8) data reflects this with the large share of employment in agricultural sectors dominated by several occupations such as: Livestock Farmers (73,600); Crop Farmers (46,000); and Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmers (28,000) (DoE, 2014b:8) (Figure 2). In the context of the SWP, and its future expansion, it is important to note that this industry is comprised of a large number of labourers in its workforce, particularly in industry subsectors in regional Australia where there are seasonal peaks in demand. The occupations that are most subject to seasonal variability are Livestock Farm Workers (24,600) and Crop Farm Workers (19,700) (DoE 2014a:8). Aside from the expected expansion of the SWP in the horticulture sector, there is also likely to be substantial demand in the dairy industry and in broad acre farming.

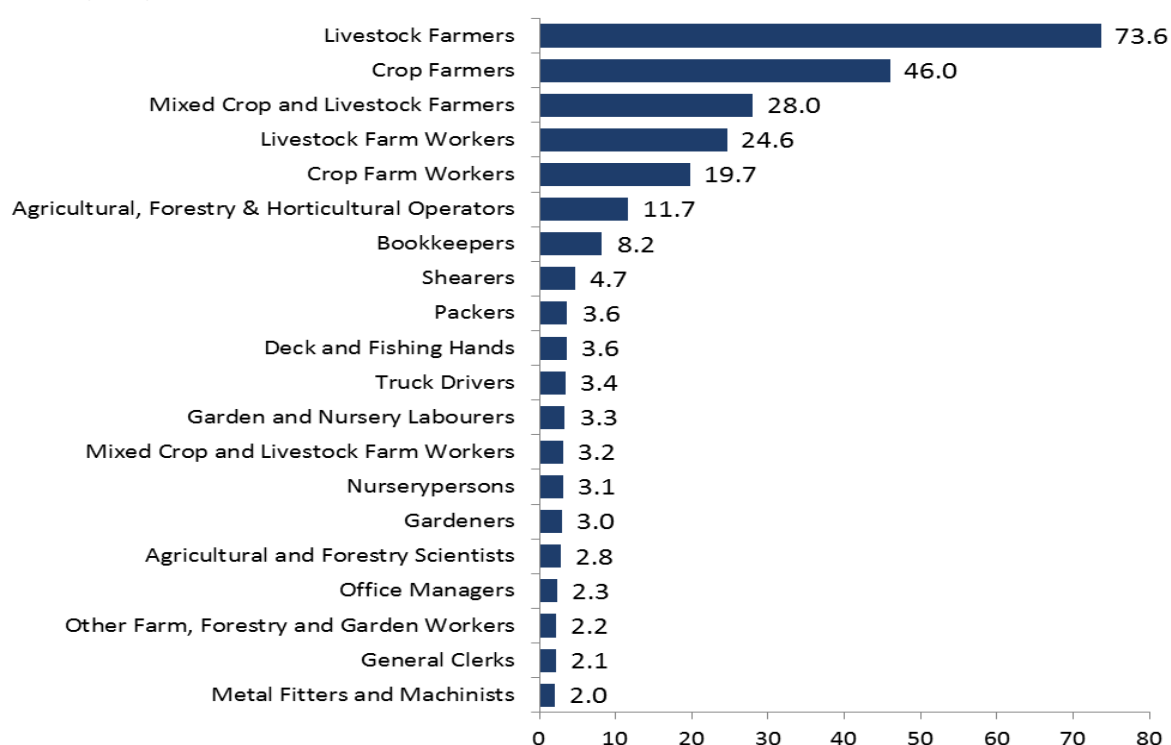
This industry is characterised by low skills and educational attainment, which is also reflected in its below national median earnings available in this sector:

The majority of people employed in this industry have a relatively low level of educational attainment compared to the Australian national average: 60.0 per cent of the workforce achieved a qualification equivalent to Year 12 or below, compared with 40.4 per cent across all industries" (DoE 2014b:7).

The low level of formal skills, education and training profile of this industry makes it more accessible in terms of migration pathways under, for example the SWP. Pacific workers access to this industry is likely to continue to require less migration and skills pathway development than for most other Australian industries.



**Figure 2: Main employing occupations in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry ('000)**



Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, four quarter average, custom data request, 2013: (DoE, 2014b:8).

### *Current Policy Discussions on Labour Needs in Agriculture*

New people will be needed to fill job openings as older worker retire from agriculture: this could be around 100,000 job openings for livestock and crop farmers to 2025, according to the work undertaken by the Australian Workforce Productivity Agency (AWPA), (AWPA 2013).

The *Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014) reiterates Australian Government commitment to a strong agriculture sector that will create rewarding jobs for Australians. However, it recognises that:

..domestic labour has not met all of agriculture's needs due to domestic labour mobility inertia, remote locations, seasonal and temporary work and working conditions. The agriculture sector will continue to need foreign labour. The Government will continue to offer visa schemes to help the sector fill labour supply gaps (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014: xxvi).

Bipartisan endorsement of the SWP (Ball 2015a) indicates that Pacific labour mobility is regarded by the Australian government as a viable international labour supply option to meet structural low skill labour shortages. To support this ongoing development, the Labour Mobility Assistance Program

(funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) will focus on Pacific capacity building for PICs to meet Australian demand and facilitate Pacific development outcomes from labour mobility.

### *Illegal labour Supply*

If the Australian government, through the Fairwork Ombudsmen increases workplace compliance around illegal labour supply in the agricultural sector, this is likely to increase demand for PIC workers under the SWP. Initial evidence from industry and government consultations and preliminary fieldwork by SSGM scholars indicates earlier compliance activities in 2014 have positively impacted demand for SWP workers.

This submission recommends that:

- Thus while this industry does have growing labour demand for foreign workers, employment and human rights safeguards need to be at the forefront of Australian government provision of an adequate policy and compliance framework to ensure the expansion of the SWP continues to be based on Australian Workplace Laws and safeguards.

### *Conclusion*

It is clear that Australia will continue to need foreign labour to support the Agrifood industry. In its submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the National Farmers Federation called for the Australian Government to allow greater flexibility in labour arrangements and ensure workplace relations arrangements appropriately meet the needs of the agriculture sector, including through filling skills gaps from overseas sources.

As a result of the ageing of the industry workforce and the growing economic prominence of this industry, Australia has significantly expanded its foreign labour demand from the Pacific by uncapping the number of workers that can be employed under the SWP. Given that the SWP is located in the horticulture sector, and is demonstrating productivity gains for this industry sub-sector, PICs are well placed to play a substantial role in filling expanded demand, especially if additional employment opportunities open up across the whole of the agrifood industry.

### *Tourism*

The Australian tourism industry is a high growth sector where there is likely to be growing demand for Pacific seasonal workers. According to Australian Government figures, in 2012-13 it directly contributed \$42 billion to national GDP, and indirectly contributed a further \$48 billion. This industry is the largest service sector of the Australian economy, and is experiencing increased international demand of around 7 to 8 per cent annually, and accounts for 8.9 per cent of total Australian exports (Austrade 2014:1).

The tourism industry is a significant employer. For example, employment figures for 2012-13 reveal it directly provided approximately 543,600 jobs, which accounted for 4.7% of total national employment. There are also spin off effects from direct employment. The tourism industry also generates significant indirect labour demand and “contributed 385,000 more jobs though other supporting industries” (Austrade, 2014:1). While the Australian tourism industry continues to expand, labour and skills shortages act as barriers to growth for the tourism industry (Austrade 2014).

When considering future labour force needs of an industry or occupation, retirement rates impact significantly on demand, particularly in the context of the overall ageing of the Australian workforce. In projections of annual retirement rates, DAE have calculated several occupations that sit within the tourism industry have retirement rates that are higher than the national average (Table 4). These are: accommodation and hospitality managers; cleaners and laundry workers; miscellaneous hospitality, retail and service managers; receptionists (DAE/DRET 2011:7).

Tourism is a labour intensive, seven-day-a-week industry, which depends on an adequately supplied and skilled workforce to service its customer. The Australian tourism industry is highly seasonal by nature, particularly in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. In 2011 Deloitte Access Economics (DAE) released a report on the *Australian Tourism Labour Force* (DRET 2011). This Report, based in part on Census and survey data, found that around half (47%) of all business reported as seasonal business (DAE/DRET, 2011).

Australian government (DEEWR 2010) forecasts indicate a similar pattern of demand growth, with a focus around food services occupations. In particular, there is anticipated very strong growth in employment numbers of chefs, cooks and cafe workers (Table 4). For example, by 2015, it was predicted that kitchenhands would remain in greatest demand (79,245 persons), followed by waiters (79,038 persons) and bar attendants (43,813 persons). By 2015 estimates were that the industry would have 23,847 more positions than in 2011 (DAE/DRET 2011: 13-14).

**Table 4: Tourism occupations with high vacancy levels**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Expected 5-year employment growth</b>	<b>Vacancy level</b>
Hotel and Motel Managers	Decline	High
Chefs	Strong growth	Very high
Cooks	Strong growth	Very high
Café workers	Strong growth	Very high
Gaming workers	Moderate growth	High
Hotel service managers	Strong growth	High
Waiters	Very strong growth	High
Bar Attendants and Baristas	Strong growth	High
Tourism and Travel Advisers	Slight growth	High
Housekeepers	Relatively steady	High
Other Mobile Plant Operators	Relatively steady	High

Source: DAE/DRET (2011)

The range of initiatives by the Australian government to address both current and future labour shortages in the tourism industry indicates that there is significant potential for PICs to align their internationally focused labour market development plans with the projected labour demands in Australian tourism.

The findings of the DAE Report (2011) indicate that the tourism industry's demand for labour will rise. This finding indicates that labour market opportunities for Pacific island nationals will increase, particularly in the low to semi-skilled categories. National and regional investment in training would be an appropriate strategy to meet growing Australian skills demand in these occupations. Employment in the tourism sector, particularly accommodation, are female dominated, and may provide more employment opportunities for Pacific island women than may be available in the AgriFood industries.

### *The Health Care and Social Assistance Industry*

Australia is increasingly a service sector economy. Structural shifts in the Australian economy have witnessed employment declines in manufacturing and increased demand in the service sector. According to the Department of Employment, the Health Care and Social Assistance industry has been the key employment generator of new jobs in the Australian labour market since the 1990s (DoE 2015b:2). It is the largest growth industry in the Australian economy: with 1.4 million workers and accounts for 12 percent of national employment. It is also the largest employing industry in regional Australia, with around 442,600 jobs (DoE 2015d). The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2015:4) projects that "one in every four new jobs created between 2013 and 2018 will be in the Community Services and Health industry".

Workers in the Health Care and Social Assistance industry are generally highly skilled, although this varies considerably across industry sub-sectors. More than eighty percent of the workforce in this industry have completed post-school study. This industry is also characterised by a workforce with a high level of tertiary qualifications: 45% have a bachelor degree or higher qualification (compared with 28.4 per cent for employed national employment as a whole) (DoE 2015d:19). These statistics reflect the higher skill requirements for entry to many of the major occupations in this sector. A high proportion of workers are Professionals (almost twice the national average) (DoE 2015d).

In terms of the lower skills profile of this industry where there may be entry points for Pacific Islanders, "only 11.9 per cent of Health Care and Social Assistance workers have not achieved a Year 12 or higher qualification compared with 21.0 per cent of all workers" (Department of Employment 2014c:7). As well, a marginally smaller proportion of workers in this industry hold a Certificate III or IV level (18.7 per cent) compared with all workers (20.7 per cent) (Department of Employment 2014c:7). These statistics indicate that short-term migration pathways for PICS will be difficult.

Following the existing skills profile of the industry, the greatest demand will be for workers possessing a bachelor's degree (45%) in contrast to workers possessing a Cert III or above (32%) and no post school qualification (18%) (DoE 2015d:39). Over the next five years the highest demand will be for nurses (224,600); Aged and Disabled Carers (124,300); Child Carers (104,500); Nursing Support and Personal Care Workers (83,300); and Receptionists (77,600) (DoE, 2015:39). It is not recommended that PICS seek to fill the need for nurses, as a policy to meet this demand will atrophy their health sectors, and there are countries, such as the Philippines that dominate global nurse export (Ball, 2008).

As well, this industry workforce is becoming more qualified. The Community Services and Health Industry Environmental Scan (2015) reports that this is particularly the case in the Early Childhood and Education and Care (ECEC) sector. They found that "between 2010 and 2013 the proportion of workers in contact roles with an ECEC related qualification increased from 69.8% to 82%, while the proportion without an ECEC related qualification reduced from 30.2% to 18%" (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2015:14-15).

As notes above, child and aged carers, nursing support and personal care workers and receptionists are the mostly highly demanded occupations amongst the lower skilled occupations in this sector. These latter occupations would provide potential labour migration access points for PICs, due to the lower education and training requirements for these occupations. However, these are non-seasonal occupations and are not therefore eligible under the current framing of the SWP.

### *Conclusion*

Demographic trends have clear implications for the structure of labour migration flows from the Pacific to Australia. The expansion of Pacific seasonal labour mobility will be increasingly important for PICs, Australian industry and future Australia-Pacific regional engagement.

PICs are well placed to meet low skilled labour demand in Australia. Work in Australia will facilitate knowledge and skills transfer back into the Pacific. A focus on lower skills development in PICs has also the potential to provide the entry point for a larger numbers of Pacific Islanders to be employed in Australia.

This submission recommends that:

- The PICs build their capacity to meet projected demand in Australia by strategically focusing on lower skills qualifications and skill set development, in the first instance, particularly in the agrifood industry, tourism and hospitality industries. It is recommended that lower skills development and training be provided to Australian competencies.

The expanded SWP offers continued improvement in industry productivity, confidence in labour supply and long-term sustainability. For PICs it offers increased youth employment and local level development through the capital infusion from worker remittances that accompany access to Australia's labour market. Recent DoE data reveals that increased industry demand for seasonal workers in horticulture is growing (Table 1). Combined with the strong possibility that increased

crack-downs on illegal labour might accelerate growing demand for the SWP, there is great potential for labour opportunities to flourish in existing industries under the now expanded SWP. From the Pacific side, meeting anticipated increased demand will require PICs to develop more robust labour export processes and invest in labour mobility as a national development priority.

In the longer term, expanded labour mobility from the Pacific to Australia will require strategic engagement with particular industries and industry subsectors that best meet the PICs' labour force supply profile. Longer term strategic planning and engagement with Australia's labour force will also require skills mapping/benchmarking with which PICs can carefully structure their education and training systems to meet both national and regional (Australia and New Zealand) labour demand. Such systems can be developed within a broad regional labour market development and integration framework. This will require both changes in the immigration policies of the Australia and New Zealand and careful investment by small PIC governments to support the transfer of skills between countries (Ball 2015a).

This submission recommends that:

- The SWP be expanded in the tourism industry once the current phase of expansion in the agriculture and accommodation sectors are stabilised.
- PICs, Australian industry and the Australian government work to develop a skills development and labour mobility strategy to meet current and future demand in the above sectors, which most closely match PIC skills and education profile. SSGM will convene a Roundtable later in 2015 to initiate this development. It is suggested that these skills development strategies and programs be delivered under the Australian Aid program.

#### **4. The impact on the Australian labour force of the current and projected seasonal worker program.**

The SWP assists in filling seasonal labour shortages to meet unmet labour demand in Australian industry. Labour market testing required by the Department of Employment for Australian employers seeking to recruit workers through the SWP, provides an important safeguard that SWP workers are “not taking Australian jobs”. While labour market testing is regarded by some employers in the SWP as onerous, it does provide a safeguard that the SWP is not undermining the integrity of the Australian labour market. However, there may be mechanisms for making labour market testing less onerous in regions and industry sub-sectors where there is clear evidence of long-term structural labour market shortages.

As demonstrated in the previous section, labour shortages in key industries are projected to grow, particularly in rural and regional Australia where there are peaks in seasonal labour demand. The provision of a reliable and productive workforce will be necessary to maintain industry sustainability and build business and investment confidence. A benefit observed in seasonal workers programs in Canada and New Zealand is that using seasonal workers in agriculture and horticulture industries created new employment opportunities for local businesses and job seekers (Bailey 2014; Bauder 2002; Colby 1997).

## **5. The merits and challenges of increased recruitment of overseas workers, in particular providing increased access for women and youth workers.**

### *Pacific Women and Seasonal Labour Mobility*

SSGM research shows that there is clear imbalance in the participation rates of Pacific men and women in seasonal labour mobility (Bailey, Ball, Haley, Keen 2015a forthcoming). Of the 9869 Pacific workers in the RSE (7855) and SWP (2014) in 2013-14, just 1138 (11.5%) were women (Immigration New Zealand 2015; Chatter 2015). Participating countries by region in 2013-14 were; Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu); Micronesia (Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu) and Polynesia (Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu). When this data is then disaggregated by sub-region striking differences emerge. For example, in 2013-14, 38% of Micronesian workers were women, 18% were Melanesian and only 12% Polynesian. There are similar sub-regional differences evident in Pacific women's labour mobility to New Zealand with Micronesia recording the highest rates of women's participation at 40%, followed by Melanesia (16%) and Polynesia (8%) (ibid).

Across the Pacific women are less likely to participate in the paid labour force (World Bank 2014), so the labour mobility program statistics reflect broader trends. A priority of Australia's recently launched Labour Mobility Initiative (LMI) (June 2015) is to increase women's participation in seasonal labour mobility. Significant sub-regional variability in participation rates would suggest that barriers to women's involvement in labour mobility are at least partly driven by cultural factors (Kagan 2015).

The gender composition of labour mobility is highly critical to development impacts. The more women participate in seasonal labour mobility schemes such as SWP, the more they are able to invest remittances well, and [the more development spin-offs in labour sending countries are likely to occur](#). Bailey, Ball and Chatter are conducting research examining opportunities, constraints and various forms of female participation in Australia and New Zealand's seasonal worker programs.

[Gibson and McKenzie](#) (2011) obtained opinions of workers about the suitability of seasonal work for men and women. They found opinions about gender roles and participation in seasonal work to be closely aligned for the two countries surveyed: Tonga and Kiribati. The majority of workers from Tonga (95%) felt that seasonal work in Australia was more suitable for men than women. However, all of the i-Kiribati workers and household respondents (which was a small number) felt that seasonal work was equally suitable for men and women.

Gibson and McKenzie's findings correspond to women's participation by major sub-region and indicate that cultural attitudes to gender roles may be central to explaining country patterns in women's participation. Ball (2015a forthcoming), Bailey (2015) and Chatter's (2015) research demonstrate that women's participation in seasonal labour mobility is clearly contested across the region. This is an important dynamic to understand and work with in order to maximize balanced "gender and development gain" from seasonal labour mobility.



Poor participation rates may also reflect concerns about the safety of women. It may be there are concerns about women's vulnerability in being in a team of largely men and working away from protections of home in Australia. Women may chose not to be part of the SWP for this reason. The gatekeepers of opportunity, such as community leaders or managers of government labour sending units, may be biased against women (Ball 2015 forthcoming). Continued research from the SSGM research team will identify various opportunities and constraints in female access to the SWP.

Employer demand for workers with particular attributes would also clearly impact gendered participation. There is some heavy horticultural work where men might be better suited than women, such as pruning large trees and picking heavy crops. The role of Polynesian men in the Australian almond sector is a clear example where strength and size is an obvious advantage for pruning. There are also many types of horticultural and packing shed work, such as picking berries, tomatoes and herbs that should not preclude women, and where work could be made more readily available to them. There may well be country specialisations in particular types of horticultural work that may be more suitable for women rather than men. Gender and labour market segmentation analysis under the SWP is another area ripe for further research (Ball 2015 forthcoming).

Increased participation of women in labour mobility urgently requires capacity building and increased engagement around this issue by key stakeholders. From a labour sending country perspective, the recruitment of women and greater liaison with employers regarding the type of work required could help address disparate participation of women and men. Overwhelmingly recruitment practices have targeted men in rural sectors. 'Policy changes in countries of origin and destination are instrumental' (Sijapoti 2015) in uptakes of women migrants. Improving working relationships between Labour Export Units of Pacific States and employers of seasonal workers, to identify greater employment opportunities for Pacific women should be given priority. It could also be achieved through the development of recruitment strategies that seek to work with cultural sensitivities and yet to be identified barriers to women's participation in labour mobility (Ball 2015 forthcoming).

If Australia and Pacific island nations wish to increase female labour mobility then these policies need a stronger gender focus, and research identifying barriers to their participation in Australia and in the Pacific will be important to addressing this imbalance. Sophia Kagan (2014) has highlighted that enhancing labour mobility of women is not a priority of policy within Pacific Island states, which reflects broader gender norms regarding women's labour force participation across the Pacific.

#### *Youth participation*

Youth participation is a complex subject. Australia's SWP has a minimum age restrictions for participation of 21, compared to New Zealand's RSE of 18 years. It was hoped that seasonal labour schemes would help target some of the problematic 'Pacific Youth Bulge' dynamics within the region. Graeme Dobell notes "This youth bulge and lack of jobs are part of the reason for the violent unrest that is becoming far too familiar in the arc of instability....Polynesia is quiet because its young workers can go overseas; Melanesia faces turmoil because its young workers have no jobs no hope"

(2007: 68). This is an area that needs further development and research to assess the potential of these youth populations accessing the SWP.



## 6. The role of the Seasonal Worker Program in supporting development assistance in the Pacific.

International studies have shown that remittances play a large part in the economic sphere of developing countries. Global remittances for 2012 were estimated to be USD529 billion of which at least USD401 billion went to developing countries. Kunz (2009:160) observes that there is “a new global remittance trend” in the name of poverty reduction and development. Like others (Bakewell 2007; Harris 2005), she notes that in the past migration was seen as “a completely distinct area of concern from development, or as the outcome of lacking or failed development” (2009:162). In the past, migration was argued by some studies to be problematic (Massey et al 1993; Reichart 1981).

Now perspectives are more mixed; multilateral and national government agencies are viewing migrant remittances as a potential source of economic development. This is referred to as the migration-development nexus (Hear and Sørensen 2003). Using remittances from the SWP and RSE for economic development is a central objective of both labour mobility programs from Australia and New Zealand.

The relationship between migration and development is increasingly regarded in both the Pacific and in the Caribbean as contestable (Connell and Conway, 2000). Seasonal workers in SSGM study by Bailey (2014) found that Pacific workers welcomed the opportunities to work overseas, and to support their families and communities:

We would rather work for our money than be given aid. To do it for ourselves and not be dependent on aid, yes that is why we are here. We want our children to have a better education than we did. Most of us did not go past years four and five. We do not want this for our children and some monies we take back will go towards a scholarship fund for our children to get a better education (Ron cited in Bailey, 2009: 58).

Seasonal workers are engaging in their own ‘self-development.’ Remittances provided by SWP and RSE workers are delivering locally specific forms of development. For example, community projects focusing on health and water access projects) or individual household needs, education and the construction of houses (Bailey 2014).

The SWP supports development on a number of levels. Firstly through the use of worker remittances, it enables broader opportunities for education, providing start-up funds for local business ventures (this has also enabled new employment opportunities for non-participating seasonal workers), incomes from the program afford the opportunity to participate in community development projects such as building new water supply systems, health clinics and repairing or building new infrastructures (Bailey 2014).

Findings from the impact of Tongan workers employed under the New Zealand RSE scheme in sending communities in Tonga, is that it has been largely rural based, pro-poor and has involved a high degree of community engagement in the selection of migrants for the scheme. In the Vanuatu case, by contrast, workers tended to be from wealthier households and were more literate and healthier than the average ni-Vanuatu (Luthria, 2008; McKenzie et. al. 2008). Initial research findings for both countries clearly indicates that the type of recruitment model used by sending

governments and the degree of community involvement in worker selection has been critical to initial development outcomes, both at the household and community levels.

Communal remittances and tithing obligations of migrants to their sending communities was found to be in place in some cases, which were used for building community-level capacities. This is consistent with earlier research that found that communal remittances in the Pacific are of greater significance than in other world regions (Connell and Brown, 1995: 1). Worker recruitment for the SWP and RSE scheme is strongly gendered in Vanuatu (McKenzie, et. al. 2008; Hammond and Connell forthcoming) and in Tonga (Gibson et. al. 2008) where married men with children were overwhelmingly most likely to apply, and be selected for work under this scheme. For example, in Tonga there was a much lower rate of women applying for selection in the RSE scheme (one in forty) compared to men (one in five) (Gibson et. al. 2008).

### *Gender Impacts*

Knowledge of the gendering of migration, remittance and investment decision making, the differential impacts on women and men, and an understanding of how labour mobility is affecting the gendering of household divisions of labour, and women's lives more generally, remains limited on a regional level (Ball 2009). Evaluations from Gibson and McKenzie (2014) and the upcoming Work Bank Impact Evaluation survey on SWP that the SSGM team are involved will help develop future research pathways in these areas.

Related to women's participation in labour mobility is the need to understand how remittance use is contested within households. Women's direct (as workers) and indirect (as receivers of remittances) participation in labour mobility and its impacts are related to whether they have real control over remittances. These are important dynamics to understand in order to avoid unintended consequences from seasonal labour mobility; such as increased domestic violence due to conflict over remittance use (Ball 2015 forthcoming). Future gender focused research by the SSGM team on the range of Pacific perspectives on these issues would benefit capacity building to ensure it supports women's empowerment.

### *Conclusion and Recommendations*

The SWP has provided both development benefits and increased productivity in agriculture. This program presents a win-win for both Australia foreign aid delivery and engagement with the Pacific, and meeting labour shortages that have stymied industry sustainability.

To improve its effectiveness, this submission recommends:

- Research be undertaken to assess the impact of SWP on the barriers to women's engagement in the Program.
- Capacity building focused on improving working relationships between Pacific Labour Export Units and employers of seasonal workers, to identify safe, culturally appropriate employment opportunities for Pacific women should be given priority, once greater understanding of these

barriers are reached. Research by the SSGM team will enable and inform targeted capacity building.

- A “Women Only” pilot program be developed for women to be employed under the SWP in e.g. horticulture packing shed work and in the accommodation sector.
- Ongoing monitoring of the development impacts of the SWP on Pacific communities and gender impacts.
- Ongoing investment in capacity building with partner-island governments to build efficient, safe and reliable labour supply mechanisms.

## 7. Legislative and other impediments in attracting seasonal workers.

The following are some identified barriers to attracting seasonal workers:

Changes to the cost sharing arrangements under the SWP were announced in the *Northern Australia White Paper*. From a Pacific and development impacts perspective, there is concern over the costs of accessing the SWP for people from low income Pacific countries, with the burden of costs being shifted more to SWP workers. Although costs have been reduced for many employers, transportation costs for workers are a barrier for many in Pacific island states, especially those living in either remote rural regions or countries such as Kiribati, PNG, Tuvalu and the Solomon islands where transportation costs have them at a disadvantage compared to other Pacific nations.

As discussed earlier, restriction on the age of seasonal workers impedes pro-poor, pro-youth involvement. The development benefits of the LMAP could be enhanced if workers aged from the ages of 18-21 were included.

- High numbers of unemployed youth is a major challenge for most Pacific island states. Many youth from Vanuatu look to these schemes as something to aspire to. Currently the majority of youth are disqualified from most forms of domestic paid employment opportunities and are being excluded from opportunities to apply for international labour schemes is another source of disenfranchisement.
- Having access to seasonal labour schemes could be a positive path for youth if given the opportunity. New Zealand's RSE program has an eligibility age of 18, allowing youth to enter. To date there has been no reports that youth entering the RSE scheme as presenting a challenge to the program. Sending countries also have their own legislation on age restrictions therefore if the SWP was to extend employment opportunities to this age bracket it would need further consultation with Pacific sending nations.

This submission recommends:

- A "Pro-Youth" Pilot be established to assess the effectiveness of recruitment of 18 to 21-year-old workers for both labour sending Pacific countries and Australian industry productivity.
- Examination of how costs to workers could be best offset to enable a greater pro-poor reach of the SWP to occur, so that workers do not need to borrow at usurious leading rates to enter the SWP. For example, a re-entry tax for returning workers could be used to develop a SWP workers bank from which poor remote workers could borrow to finance initial costs of obtaining SWP employment, such as: passport and visa costs, health checks and transportation costs.

## **8. The visa regime for seasonal workers, including compliance and related issues.**

Currently the visa fee for seasonal workers is relatively high (approx. \$365). Although lower than standard backpacker visas, seasonal workers also have less time to recuperate the fee and the visas also have greater restrictions with them. The costs of visas are a significant burden for workers and are counter to the development objectives of the SWP. This submission recommends:

- A significant reduction in visa fees to enable greater pro-poor inclusiveness of the SWP.
- A proportion of the visas fees be reinvested to build labour sending country capacity to enable strong pro-poor recruitment systems particularly from rural and remote Pacific communities in order to spread positive development impacts of the SWP.

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