



YHA AUSTRALIA

23 July 2020

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
(via email to migration@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Chair,

Re: Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker program

I write in support of the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) reciprocal cultural exchange program.

YHA Australia is a not-for-profit organisation with the mission of promoting 'learning through travel'. Established in this country over 80 years ago, YHA provides a network of 68 youth hostels as part of the global 'Hostelling International' network of 3,000 hostels in 60 countries. Each year in Australia, we host around 300,000 guests from 180 countries, many of whom are on Working Holidays.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, inbound travel - which traditionally makes up 70% of YHA's customer base - has been particularly impacted. However, the vast majority of our hostels are currently open, managing the safety of staff and guests by complying stringently with all government regulations around hygiene, social distancing and public gatherings.

There are still approximately 80,000 Working Holiday Makers in Australia, many of whom are eager to extend their stays by working in critical sectors such as agriculture or bushfire recovery volunteering. These motivated young people contribute greatly to the tourism sector, and to general society, in Australia. In particular:

- The program covers 44 countries, bringing together diverse nationalities, who share work, living and travel experiences together - and with their host communities in Australia
- Many WHMs work temporarily in critical sectors such as agriculture and nursing, filling short-term and seasonal labour gaps
- Northern Australia relies on WHMs to assist with seasonal work in tourism & hospitality sectors
- Being mobile, WHMs are able to travel easily to where the temporary work in regional areas is (something Australians with more fixed commitments are often unable to do)
- Working Holiday Makers travel further, stay longer and spread their tourism dollars widely throughout regional communities - each spends on average \$10,300 (*source: Tourism Australia March 2019 WHM fact sheet*)
- WHMs contribute in excess of \$2bn to the visitor economy each year, most of which is spent on exploring Australia, on accommodation, tours & transport and food & drink (*source: as above*)
- Eligibility for the program has been extended to age 35 for citizens of Ireland, France and Canada, and there is opportunity to do so for the remaining 41 countries
- Barriers to WHMs coming to Australia should be reviewed, including the high cost of the visa, and the caps on many countries under the 462 visa sub-class
- It should be remembered that the program is reciprocal, providing the opportunity for many young Australians to live, work and travel for extended periods in those 44 participating countries.

I am happy to provide more information or to speak at a public hearing on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Paul McGrath.

Paul McGrath, CEO