



Answer to question:

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION:

CHAIR: ... As the industry looks forward to recovering, would it be of assistance if it was recognised that we probably will never be able to train enough or encourage enough training in the hospitality industry—of chefs and cooks, for example, and maybe other jobs, like waitressing or front of house or management or kitchen management—and that we may not be able to attract enough traineeships locally, and that this could be one area that could form the basis of a temporary visa to Australia for people who are trained in these areas overseas? They could work for a period of time, and we could then attach a permanent pathway to that visa. Would that be a simpler way of dealing with this issue?

Mr Sawday: Our primary objective in considering improvements to our workforce needs is to focus on the domestic workforce.

CHAIR: Sure, but this would be one component of it.

Mr Sawday: It's one component, and, as I said, we do want to bolster the apprenticeship system. We're optimistic that, with the right changes, those pathways, perhaps from school or from other cohorts, will make our industry less reliant on migrant workers. The high majority of club workers remain domestic Australian workers; more than 100,000 of our workers are Australians. With respect to what you put to us, **we can take that specific idea on notice and come back to you with whether we think there's some value in exploring that sort of arrangement.**

ANSWER:

Clubs Australia supports opportunities to establish pathways to permanent migration for skilled workers who are engaged on a temporary visa. It is important that Australia's migration program is competitively administered to attract skilled workers into the country and incentivises integration for workers and their families into local communities. Clubs Australia broadly supports incentives and tailored support to attract and retain migrant workers to regional Australia.

Structural and administrative deficiencies, such as labour market testing (LMT), limit the availability of migrant workers for clubs. Clubs Australia supports reducing red tape associated with the migration process – including removing LMT – to support more employers to access the skilled migration program.

Clubs Australia sees merit, in principle, in any visa arrangements where hospitality businesses can employ migrants trained overseas in key hospitality skills. We welcome any further opportunity to consult with Government on this issue to achieve a migration system that works for clubs, employees and local communities.

QUESTION:

Dr WEBSTER: With regard to employer sponsoring, I am very aware of how expensive it can be to bring skilled migrants in. Should there be a responsibility to remain with that employer who has sponsored the migrant into Australia to work, as opposed to providing ways out? Prior to you, we heard from the unions. They don't believe we should have any holding power, if you like, for an employer in sponsoring a migrant, particularly when exploitation takes place, because of the difficulty for a migrant being able to expose that exploitation and the risk that they will be ousted from Australia. I understand the complexity of the issue but, in your view, is the sponsoring cost for bringing migrants into a business still worth connecting that migrant with employers as a general principle because they're the ones who bear the cost? Or is there another way where that cost could be passed onto the next employer should the employee wish to move on?

Mr Sawday: [Inaudible] community venues and clubs, their operations are quite transparent to their members and their communities. We're not aware of any exploitation issues within clubs. I'm mindful that the recent report commissioned by the home affairs department seemed to propose a solution to the issue you've just described, in that the nomination costs be equalised over the period of the visa and that a worker should be permitted to move employers. We reviewed that report. We don't yet have a position on whether that's a proposal that we would support, but I would make the point that a lot of clubs use agents to recruit overseas workers, and those costs probably can't be—it would be difficult to equalise those costs. If there is an upfront payment or investment by the sponsoring business then our concern is that if it is too easy for a worker to move jobs then that initial employer wouldn't have the same incentive to incur those upfront costs. But whether those costs can be equalised is something which we will be exploring. **We can take that on notice and provide our thoughts to the committee.**

ANSWER:

Clubs Australia shares the views held by unions; that the migration system needs protections to ensure migrant workers are not exploited.

Clubs Australia notes that skilled visa holders already have opportunities to switch employers by applying for a new visa. We support, in principle, a system which simplifies this process while ensuring the initial sponsoring business does not incur disproportionate upfront costs. Such an arrangement would be optimal if the costs of accessing a skilled migrant – including discretionary support, such as paying for flights to Australia – are equalised between the original and subsequent employers. This measure would ensure employers are not unfairly burdened with financial costs if a skilled migrant decided to relocate elsewhere.

We note that some costs will be challenging to equalise between employers, including third party costs like agent fees, which may be structured as an upfront lump sum.

Clubs Australia also considers that any changes which encourage job mobility must seek to protect regional businesses, who commonly see their skilled visa holders – such as chefs and cooks – move to a metropolitan employer within months of commencing employment. In these circumstances, the regional club incurs a significant financial and resourcing cost. It is already difficult for these communities to attract and retain skilled workers and vacancies are often prolonged if a skilled worker resigns.

To encourage more migrant workers to move to regional areas, Clubs Australia supports any Government measures to enhance infrastructure, support services, as well as housing availability and affordability. Regional clubs are often compelled to provide temporary accommodation to incentivise migrants to settle in regional locations.

Clubs Australia would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Federal Government on these matters.