

Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023, and the Migration (Visa Pre-application Process) Charge Bill 2023

Senate committee submission

Our views on the bill and the Pacific Engagement Visa

Our Church sees immense unfairness in running any type of immigration visa with a lottery at the centre of it. This defies the logic of every other visa Australia offers people from all around the world. With every other type of visa, a criteria is set, if you meet the criteria, you get the visa granted and if not, you get rejected.

We struggle as a Church to understand why this system is being replaced.

The Bill, which allows for the charge for people to enter the lottery is therefore, also unfair.

You are asking people to pay to enter a system, when they have no control of whether or not they get a successful outcome. This appear to be a high stakes version of playing the Golden Casket, but instead of numbers coming up for a large sum of money, the government is playing with the lives of people and their families.

There are multiple other ways for government to cap visa numbers without a lottery, this is just a way that government has decided to do it.

We are also concerned about the fact that the Department website provides no clarity as to where the point of application most originate from. That is, can people living in Australia apply for this visa or not? Can people from New Zealand apply for this visa or not?

When one part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website states that *"Priority is being given to countries with limited permanent migration opportunities to Australia, or citizenship rights with New Zealand, France and the United States."*, we take this to assume that Pacific Islanders living in Australia or New Zealand are exempt.

However, if you scroll down the page, the same website states that *"To be eligible for the PEV, primary applicants will need to: "*

- *be aged between 18 and 45 years to enter the ballot*
- *hold a passport from a participating country*
- *have been born in, or have a parent who was born in, a participating country*
- *be selected through the ballot process*
- *secure a formal full-time job offer in Australia*
- *meet English language, character and health requirements*

Applicants can include a partner and legally dependent children in their application."

From a plain reading of this section, it opens the door to Samoans, Tongans and the like being able to apply from New Zealand.

This lack of clarification provides confusion to the Pasifika diaspora residing in Queensland. There is a large proportion of our families who have family living in New Zealand, would consider reuniting with their families under such a visa. The lack of detail when it comes to country of origin regarding where the people have to live to apply is something that needs to be addressed.

If the rule is made that only people living in country can apply, then it shows just how little Australia continues to understand how Polynesian peoples across the Pacific.

This is also a direct link to the fact that whilst Australia seeks to give Aid for sport and community good, it does not do a lot to deliver economic development assistance to a country such as Samoa.

Our Church is concerned that one of the unintended consequences of this will be that in the context of Samoans and Tongans, they are likely to find either one of two things happen – we lose more of our skilled workers at a faster rate, or, they find that as they try and get into the ballot for this visa to come to Australia, they are frustrated because Papua New Guineans got all the spots. PNG has millions of people and in Samoa, we don't. There appears to be nothing to deal with ensuring every country on the list gets visas.

Our context as a community

Our Father's Ministries is a Church that sits on the outer northern edge of the Moreton Bay Regional Council area. We service a largely Māori and Pasifika congregation, however, we have community members from all over the world who come to pray with us, eat with us and serve our community with us.

There is a large Pasifika community in the Moreton Bay Region, which runs from the southern border of the Sunshine Coast, through primarily the old Caboolture Shire Council area, down to Redcliffe and out to Pine Rivers. This community is dispersed by geography, demography, and culture, but brought together by its sense of wanting to come together to serve our fellow community members and show off the best of our Polynesian heritage.

Our leadership is primarily Samoan in heritage, with some from Tonga and of Maori backgrounds as well involved. This reflects the Polynesian demography of the corridor that we serve. Our Church has also been involved in raising money for local causes, helping feed the homeless, providing a safe space for our kids to study and ensuring that our youth do not get into a cycle of negative behaviour.

We have also been involved in raising money for the brightest of our young people to go to University.

For our community, with a large percentage of people on New Zealand subclass 444 visas, reform of the unfair treatment we have received under these visas has been our priority.

However, the announcement of the Pacific Engagement Visa, with many of us from Samoa, Tonga and other localities in the Pacific warrants this submission.