



23 July 2020

Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chair,

Submission to the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program (WHM)

Dried Fruits Australia(DFA) is writing to you in regard to the importance of working holiday makers to regional areas and to dried grape production.

DFA represents 300 dried grape producers along with three major processors – Sunbeam Foods, Australian Premium Dried Fruit and Murray River Organics – and supplies both export and domestic markets with an annual average of 18,000 tonnes of quality dried grapes. Sourcing productive labour continues to be a significant challenge for the sector, particularly for larger family farms and corporate enterprises, relying on temporary and seasonal migrant workers to assist with farm management and labour intensive practices such as winter pruning.

Historically, it has been difficult to attract and retain a local workforce in horticulture which has been attributed to a number of factors surrounding the nature of the work and the regional location of production. These factors have a significant impact on the availability, quality, and retention of a highly productive workforce.

WHMs are important in allowing industry to manage workforce needs and access a large number of workers that are inherently mobile (i.e. do not have fixed addresses within Australia) and are therefore able to travel to regional Australia to perform work associated with their visa conditions.

There are increasing numbers of skilled roles in horticulture. The 2017 Regional Skills Demand Profile for the Mallee region predicted a growth of 300 skilled roles and at least 600 unskilled roles over a three year period for the Mallee region alone. These roles must be underpinned by reliable seasonal harvest labour sources which to date have included predominantly WHMs, Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Facility workers. Indeed, every permanent job performed in the industry is dependent on 3 unskilled roles, usually performed by visa holders.

Dried Fruits Australia relies on the WHM program due to the challenges associated with attracting a mobile workforce to regional and rural Australia. Ongoing use of the program will be vital to the capacity of dried grape growers to continue to expand and support demand for produce, have a positive economic and social impact on regional economies and provide markets with premium Australian dried grapes.

Kind Regards,



Mark King
Chairman