



**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE**

**SECRETARIAT OF STATE FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT POLICY**

**RUA DE CAICOLI, BALIDE, DILI, TIMOR-LESTE – [REDACTED]**

10 July 2015

Our reference: 139/GSE/SEPFOPE/VII/2015

To: Chair of the Australian Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration

**Mrs. Louise Markus, MP**

**Subject: Seasonal Workers Programme**

Excellency,

Timor-Leste has participated in the Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Programme in 2012 and there are almost 392 Timorese workers who have benefited already from this programme. As such the Government of Timor-Leste through the Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment Policy (SEPFOPE) is delighted to provide Timor-Leste Government's insights that could be valuable for the Committee's inquiry.

- The seasonal workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste have played an important role in the Australian horticulture industry as they provided continued assistance to the Australian horticulture farmers to extend their farms and increase their income. It is obvious that some farmers in Australia still don't know about Seasonal Worker Programme but there are many others who already benefitted from this program.
- Expanding the Seasonal Worker Programme to other sectors such as Road and Building Constructions, Industries, Mining and Fishing are important because at present and in the

future the Australian companies involved in these sectors may face shortage of workforce. Therefore expanding the Programme to these sectors will allow the Australian companies to recruit seasonal workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste to solve their lack of workforce issue. This initiative will also contribute in supporting development assistance in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. However expanding the Seasonal Worker Programme to other countries will reduce the chance for our workers to work in these sectors and consequently will reduce the chance for the Pacific and Timor-Leste to benefit from this programme.

- The workforce from Timor-Leste must be properly trained to deal with the work demand in the new sectors as already mentioned above. In order to obtain qualified workers for these sectors, it is necessary for Timor-Leste to provide the on-the-job training program for its workers either in Australia or in Timor-Leste.
- If the Seasonal Worker Programme expands to other sectors as mentioned above, it might not have negative impact on the Australian labour force because the seasonal workers only perform to work in Australia when there is demand or shortage of Australian workforce in the country. Moreover the seasonal workers are casual employees and they work in Australia only for a short period of time according to their signed contract with the Australian approved employers/companies. Their period of stay in Australia is also limited and approved by the Government's Department of Employment in Canberra.
- Timor-Leste is satisfied with the increase of the number of seasonal workers, in particular women. Currently Timor-Leste has approximately 30% female workers in Australia and this percentage can be increased according to the demand for female workers.
- Timor-Leste has participated in the Seasonal Worker Programme since 2012 and we are aware that this programme has supported many Australian farmers/growers to extend their farms/horticulture industries and it also supports the development assistance in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Thus the extension of the Seasonal Worker Programme to other sectors should contribute benefits to the people in Australia and vice versa to the people in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.
- There are some important issues that need to be addressed by the Australian Government in order to attract seasonal workers:
  - a. Need to reduce or ponder the elimination of the Income Taxation at 15% flat rate (from the gross earning);
  - b. Simplify the process of acquiring the Superannuation for the seasonal workers from overseas;



- c. The seasonal workers should be treated wisely by their employers;
  - d. Avoid utilization of "illegal workers" in the labour force by farmers/growers.
- Visa regime: At present, for a seasonal worker in horticulture and hospitality industries, the length of her/his stay in Australia permitted by the Australian Department of Employment and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection is maximum six months which is sufficient for both sectors. However when the Seasonal Worker Programme extends to other sectors as mentioned earlier, the length of stay in Australia for a seasonal worker in those sector needs to be prolonged as most of the works in Road and Building Constructions, for instance, will require workers up to seven-nine months to conclude the construction works.

These are our views on the terms of reference and hopefully it provides some insights for the Committee to address the inquiries on the Seasonal Worker Programme.

Yours sincerely,

**Ilidio Ximenes da Costa**

Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment Policy



Cc:

1. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Estanislau da Silva
2. Ambassador of Timor-Leste for Australia, Mr. Abel Guterres