

15th January 2022

Submission to the Inquiry into the Protecting Migrant Workers Bill

This is an important issue.

Migrant workers are a critical part of the Australian economy and community. This is particularly true in rural areas, where migrant or seasonal workers are used for agricultural work. Many farms rely on migrant workers around harvest time, for example, which is a core part of delivering the fresh food that we eat. It would be very concerning then, for any migrant workers to be coerced or exploited - or otherwise not getting the adequate compensation for the critical work that they do. On a humanitarian principle, each person deserves to be respected and treated fairly and, in the Australian lingo, to have a fair go. If people are migrating to Australia to work, they are willing to work hard and serve the community - they want to get opportunities to work and to contribute, including in various jobs that are strenuous or difficult. However, they should expect that their hard work means something - rather than being taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers or migration agents.

Many farmers and other employers also want to give migrant workers a fair go - and would be disturbed by any mistreatment of migrant workers. Apart from the personal outrage, it also gives a bad name to the industry and to employers who treat their workers fairly.

There is communal support for ensuring that migrant workers are treated fairly, which is reflected by the introduction of this Bill. It is important that there be greater attention given to the conditions of migrant workers - and prosecuting employers or other people who do not follow what is legally expected of them.

It is important that the attention given to this issue focuses on the people causing the wrongdoing and exploitation. Many migrant workers would be afraid of speaking out or reporting abuse because they fear deportation or other scrutiny by immigration officials. Even if migrant workers have not followed the law exactly (e.g. maybe overstaying their visa or working on a non-work visa) the responsibility is still primarily on any migration agents (who make money in facilitating migrants to come to Australia) and on the employers who use the migrants - and benefit from them remaining in a legal limbo where they can be exploited without fear of them speaking out.

I support the greater attention being given to this issue and aiming to better protect migrant workers. I hope that this is approached with a sense of compassion and humanitarianism and helps migrant workers to have a better experience in working in Australia. Ensuring that all migrant workers are treated fairly ultimately benefits not only them but also our rural economy and community (and the food that comes to all of us).

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Cronshaw.