

10 July 2015

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Inquiry into the Seasonal Worker Programme

The dairy industry welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the inquiry into the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP). The comments below are made on behalf of the industry by Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), the national peak policy body representing dairy farmers across Australia.

Australian dairy is a \$13 billion farm, manufacturing, and export industry, with an extremely positive future, including strong potential for growth. The industry directly employs 43,000 people on farms, in factories and other industry bodies, and indirectly provides a livelihood for more than 100,000 people in service industries.

The dairy industry's most valuable asset is the people who work in it, which is why it is committed to attracting, retaining and developing the most skilled labour. Through initiatives such as the National Centre for Dairy Education (NCDE), which provides education and training through top quality Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), the industry continues to demonstrate its commitment to the local workforce.

However, in spite of the industry's efforts, dairy still suffers from a chronic skilled labour shortage. ADF is strongly supportive of initiatives to improve the industry's access to overseas labour in order to address the shortfall in appropriately skilled domestic workers. The SWP is an excellent way to assist farmers on this issue, while also providing the opportunity to develop skill sets for workers from eligible countries.

Currently, the dairy industry is not included in the list of seasonal industries, despite dairy farm operations demonstrating clear seasonality, including in calving, hay and silage making, among others.

ADF has previously lobbied for dairy to be added to this list and is pleased that the government will expand the programme to the broader Australian agriculture sector to allow all farmers to access seasonal labour.

The Seasonal Worker Programme is a truly positive initiative that would benefit both the dairy industry and seasonal workers. Dairy farmers tend to be over worked during peak seasons, thus the SWP will reduce stress associated with excessive workloads and ultimately improve farmer mental health. Furthermore, the dairy industry has a strong track record of contributing to communities in regional Australia and it is eager to similarly make contributions to communities in neighbouring countries in the Pacific.

ADF understands that there has been public discussion around the issue of foreign workers, including their treatment by employers. The dairy industry opposes any sort of mistreatment of both foreign and local workers, and works hard to educate the industry to ensure employees are treated properly.

The Employment Starter Kit Initiative (ESKi), which is a document detailing all the mandatory requirements for employment along with ideas for improving practices, recently reached over 2,000 copies of circulation nationwide. This demonstrates that dairy farmers are working hard to improve employment practice.

The dairy industry looks forward to further discussions around the expansion of this programme so that it can provide maximum benefit to both farmers and seasonal workers.

If you require further details regarding the comments made in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our Senior Policy Officer

Yours sincerely,

Noel Campbell
President