

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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23 April 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Regional Skills Relocation

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations' 'Inquiry into Regional Skills Relocation'. As the tourism and hospitality industry continues to suffer from severe shortages of skilled and general labour – particularly in regional areas – QTIC is well positioned to provide feedback into this inquiry.

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is a private sector, membership-based tourism industry organisation. QTIC represents the interests of the tourism industry - including business operators, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) and sector associations.

All of Queensland's RTOs are members of QTIC, as are 17 of the industry's sector associations and in excess of 3,000 regional members, operating in all sectors of the tourism industry.

QTIC is owned and governed by its members through member based councils, boards and committees and truly reflects the views of the industry at all levels throughout Queensland.

Feedback

QTIC continues to promote the benefits of living and working in the tourism and hospitality industry in regional areas. Through our participation at the annual 'Queensland Country and Regional Living Expo' and through our work 'in region', QTIC is well aware of the opportunities available for job seekers in regional Queensland both in tourism and hospitality and in other industries.

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QTIC supports any activities which address the skilled and general labour demands of industries in regional Australia – including the development of strategies to support the relocation of unemployed workers from areas of high unemployment to areas experiencing workforce shortages.

In addition to these comments, QTIC wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. QTIC proposes that a major issue deterring unemployed workers from relocating to areas of skills shortages is the general lack of appropriate and affordable housing in regional locations. To address this deterrent to regional relocation, QTIC suggests that government speed up the approval process for residential development to ensure that an appropriate supply of affordable accommodation is available for unemployed workers wishing to relocate regionally.
2. Another major deterrent to the relocation of potential workers to regional Australia is a lack of, or uncertain access to, a basic level of health and human services. This encompasses health, education, communication technology and a variety of other services. In order to address this, QTIC proposes the need for a more holistic government approach to regional planning – achieved through strengthening the coordination and delivery of human services to regional communities.

This suggestion of a more holistic approach to regional planning has been identified in the Queensland Government's 'Blueprint for the Bush' — a 10-year plan to build strong and prosperous communities in regional Queensland. QTIC urges the Committee to consider the content of this document as part of this review.

3. QTIC acknowledges the potential difficulties in transplanting some unemployed into service based occupations in regional areas. With this in mind, QTIC proposes the implementation of 12 week trial arrangements prior to longer term commitments being agreed upon between prospective workers and regional businesses. These trial periods would enable workers to assess their new work and lifestyle arrangements before committing to long term employment.

QTIC acknowledges that this trial initiative would only be effective if unemployed workers' access to unemployment benefits remain regardless of whether they take up a permanent position at the end of this trial period.

From a business perspective, this trial period would also enable employers to assess the effectiveness of their new staff prior to committing to full terms and conditions with them.

4. QTIC recognises that domestic relocation into regional Australia is problematic, especially for those wishing to remain close to family. With this in mind, QTIC proposes that migration options tied to regional settlement must also be considered as a component in overcoming workforce shortages in regional Australia. QTIC proposes that one such action in addressing these regional supply issues could be a reconsideration of the decision to remove regional concessions from the 457 visa.

5. QTIC acknowledges that previous attempts to financially incentivise relocation to regional areas have met with limited success. With this in mind, QTIC proposes that, when offering relocation incentives, government employ a variety of other mechanisms including taxation breaks or the allocation of training placements.
QTIC also proposes that additional incentives could be offered to employment service providers to promote and fill job vacancies in regional areas.
6. Finally, QTIC suggests that any initiatives which support the relocation of unemployed workers from areas of high unemployment to areas experiencing workforce shortages, be supported by strong promotional activities outlining the benefits of living and working in regional Australia. QTIC proposes that these activities should actively market the regions experiencing the greatest skills and general labour shortages.

QTIC welcomes the opportunity to provide input in to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations' 'Inquiry into Regional Skills Relocation'. As discussed above, the tourism and hospitality industry in Queensland continues to suffer from severe skilled and general labour shortages – particularly in regional areas. As a means of addressing these important supply issues, QTIC supports the development of strategies which facilitate the relocation of unemployed workers to regional Australia.

Please contact me on (07) 3236 1445, should you wish to further discuss any of these recommendations.

Kind Regards

Daniel Gschwind
Chief Executive