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Submission No. 6
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25th January 2007

Mr Don Randall MP
Joint Migration Committee Chairman
Inquiry into temporary business visas
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted via: jscm@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Randall,

Re: Growcom response to the Inquiry into temporary business visas

Growcom is the peak representative body for the fruit and vegetable growing industry in Queensland. We represent around 3,000 fruit and vegetable growing enterprises that are the principal driver of many local communities and economies in rural and regional Queensland. The Queensland horticulture industry provides over 25,000 jobs and contributes more that \$1.5 billion to the state economy each year.

Growcom welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on the Inquiry into temporary business visas, particularly the Temporary Business (Long Stay) 457 visas and Labour Agreements. Although these visas are not extensively used throughout the Queensland horticulture industry, there is sufficient usage to warrant consideration of the views and requirements of this industry by the Committee.

The horticulture industry has been impacted upon by skill and labour shortages for numerous years. To combat this challenge, some employers have accessed the 457 visa and Labour Agreements to employ overseas skilled workers within their horticultural businesses. Growcom provides additional assistance and information to business owners and operators in Queensland's horticulture industry through the services of a DIMA Outpost Officer.

Growcom will provide specific feedback in relation to issue for the horticulture industry and potential procedures that require improvement.

Queensland horticulture industry's use of temporary business visas

Queensland's horticulture industry is extremely diverse and involves the production of more than 120 different varieties of fruit and vegetables. The industry employs a wide range of professions including production horticulturists, WH&S officers, accountants, agricultural scientists, business managers, leading hands and marketing officers.

Labour and skills shortages remain prominent in the industry, resulting in an increasing number of producers investigating and utilising the temporary business visa programs. Although there may only be a small number of producers who access these visa programs at the moment, the number of producers who access the programs in future may significantly increase as the demand for skilled labour continues to rise. Furthermore, there is an

increasing trend for large enterprises to develop within the industry, which is further increasing the demand for skilled labour from a variety of fields. As a result, Growcom believes it is necessary to maintain reliable access to temporary business visas for Australia's production horticulture industry, as legitimate applications will continue to be lodged in order to increase skill bases and combat the national labour shortages that constrain farmers.

Feedback on specific issues and procedures

Growcom wishes to provide feedback on some specific issues and procedures that are relevant to the Queensland horticulture industry.

1. Labour Market Testing

Issues relating to skill and labour shortages have presented a significant challenge to the horticulture industry for many years. A survey conducted by Growcom in February 2006 found that the majority of growers had experienced labour shortages at some point in time and many demonstrated substantial losses as a direct result. In addition, a study completed by Growcom in June 2005 found that middle level managers in both field and shed were seen as the most difficult to recruit. Both State and Federal Governments have acknowledged labour and skill shortages (in the horticultural industry and Australia as a whole). These facts demonstrate that labour and skills shortages are felt by employers in Queensland's horticulture industry.

Growcom believes the requirement for labour market testing for any skilled occupation within the Queensland horticulture industry is not required. The issue of skill shortages is commonly known and therefore any requirement for labour market testing will simply add additional costs on employers' recruitment expenses and will result in extra burdens and associated stress. Therefore this requirement is seen as simply unnecessary.

2. Training Requirements

Employers in the horticulture industry who employ skilled workers on a 457 visa are content with their obligation to commit to the subsequent training of Australian workers. However, Growcom is concerned with issues surrounding more robust measures for determining employers' commitment to this training. The vast majority of training undertaken by employees in Queensland's horticulture industry occurs on-farm. Modifying this training requirement to one that must be demonstrated through off farm activities would greatly disadvantage the horticulture industry.

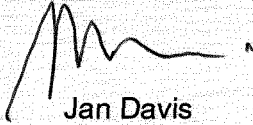
3. Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) Code

The ASCO code used within Australia's skilled migration programs, including the temporary business visas, are difficult to use in relation to the horticulture industry. The types of specialisations and roles of skilled workers within this industry do not usually fall within the classifications set out in the ASCO code. This has recently been further demonstrated through the recent inquiry by DIMA into the position of production horticulturists. Growcom prepared a detailed submission in response to this inquiry which has been attached to demonstrate the wide range of specialisations and skills that are associated with the production horticulture industry.

| exhibit 1

Growcom appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on the inquiry into temporary business visas and anticipates that the above information will be taken into consideration to ensure that the interests of the Queensland horticulture industry are represented.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Davis', with a stylized, wavy line extending to the right.

Jan Davis
CEO

cc. Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Mr Kevin Andrews