

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Pacific region seasonal contract labour

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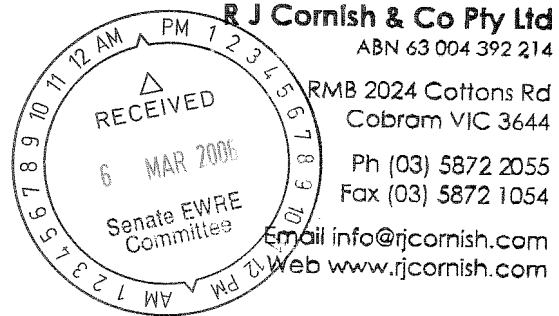
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6th March 2006

The Secretary
John Carter

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

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Inquiry on Pacific region seasonal contract labour

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to support the concept of bringing in Pacific region seasonal contract labour as a means of broadening the seasonal labour supply base.

We employ about 130 – 150 fruit pickers during the period late January to late March for piecework harvesting of pears and peaches, with our peak demand of 180 – 200 pickers in the first three weeks of March.

Our harvest season then goes into late March/April with around 80 pickers for harvesting apples.

Obviously having sufficient numbers of skilled fruit pickers is vital and shortages at the critical harvest period can be very costly to the enterprise in terms of yield and quality.

We dedicate many resources to ensuring that labour is available as the fruit demands and we provide extensive training for these workers. Generally speaking we are able to source enough labour via our web page and labour providers but we do support measures that will increase the available pool of labour.

The recently changed rule (November 2005) which allows overseas travellers to extend their visa to two years if they work 3 months in rural Australia seems to have been very well received and already we are experiencing less turnover of the 'backpacker' type worker. Further increasing the list of countries which are eligible for work permits is also a way of broadening the labour supply base.

In regard to a guest worker programme, we would view this as a means to increasing the available labour pool. We would however seek the following before engaging this type of labour –

- i) A pilot programme to test the possible system.
- ii) People who can communicate.
- iii) People who are physically capable of fruit picking.
- iv) People who don't necessarily require special meals (ie. we provide fully catered onsite facilities for our seasonal workforce).
- v) People who voluntarily want to work as fruit pickers, and not people who may be involuntary workers.
- vi) Electronic banking information for these workers.

In addition, we would expect that in principle support of such a programme is provided by the appropriate union, in our case the AWU.

Finally, these workers would be paid per whatever the appropriate award wages etc. are in place at the time and would be accorded the same treatment as any Australian worker.

Yours sincerely,


James Cornish
Director