



26 July 2006
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Dear Committee Secretary,

I believe it is imperative that I again write to the Senate Committee regarding the current proposal for a Guest Foreign Worker Scheme (GFWS) within the Australian seasonal industry.

More disturbing information has come to my knowledge regarding exaggerated information pertaining to the opportunity for earnings within the seasonal industry.

Senator Vanstone has now stated in the Senate question time, when asked about the potential for the (GFW) to be exploited. "this could be hardly the case, when the average seasonal worker earns about 60,000 dollars a year." This is far from the truth, and confirms my suspicions that the government and primary producers still have little or no respect for the welfare of seasonal workers and local labour sources.

As an above average fruit picker and average pruner, I have yet to earn half of the 60,000 dollars stated by Senator Vanstone and I have never known anyone who has. I consider as others do, that to be a rare opportunity and would require an excellent worker as well.

To allow a (GFWS) into Australia will only further reduce the already low number of the local labour force in their seasonal employment areas and it will further dishearten and crush the hopes of many of us, for an improvement in an already difficult workplace to earn a living from. As I stated before in my previous letter, that up to 75% of the harvest labour is done by backpackers within the Goulburn Valley.

The introduction of (GFW) into the Australian seasonal industry will enable employers to continue their avoidance of the fact that they are neglecting their responsibility to provide a respectable pay and conditions. The (GFW) from poorer Pacific nations will not be in a position to complain about pay rates as they are only guests and the exchange rate of the Australian dollar they will take back to their countries. I assume will be of great benefit to them, unlike their Australian counterparts whose wage value will be quite low here in Australia.

Now as for the notion that locals are just too lazy or fussy, it is my experience that this is not true. eg. haycarting was once a common seasonal employment in the Goulburn Valley, and was extremely hard work, a lot more than fruit picking, but because it paid ok, the work was always hard to get. I can't believe the Australian seasonal industry is in such dire straits as to need to employ further overseas labour because our labour force is not interested in work that earns them 60,000 dollars a year.

But as I have stated before, there are many instances of below minimum wages in the Goulburn Valley ie. the average and above worker would earn more if they did the same work on the minimum wage rate (hourly) instead of piece rate.

Seasonal work also has the drawback of not adequately sustaining employment for the full year, this is contributed again to another "vicious cycle" aspect. Without the outlook of reliable employment with fair pay and conditions, those participating in seasonal work will not have incentive to complete the current season nor others to return next season. Now another problem, unfair pay and conditions is causing is that it's choking the potential of the year-round seasonal labour force to grow substantially (eg. working in southern states in summer then moving to work in northern states in winter) because most people initially have only short-term ambitions eg. while looking or waiting for other long-lasting employment. With a greater improvement in pay and conditions I believe there will be more and more people interested in the year-round employment aspect. As it stands now most people are not interested in progressing from one lousy job to another.

The government has a fundamental responsibility to immerse itself in wisdom and truth with all its administrative responsibilities, and one of that outcomes to be equal rights for all, which I believe has not been exercised adequately through a long history of successive governments towards the Australian seasonal industry, with regards to protecting their pay and conditions, where they have no real bargaining strength through low or no union membership, which has rendered most of the seasonal work unfit for the average Australian and mostly only fit for overseas people on working holidays..

The lack of unskilled employment opportunities in most country towns, and the seasonal work available, mostly paid very poorly, and the high rates of suicides, depression, family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse and anti-social behavior, these all must go hand in hand within rural communities whose standard of living is steadily deteriorating.

To now bring in guest foreign workers into the Australian seasonal industry against the background of social and economic difficulties in rural communities, is careless and even shows some disdain of the people of rural Australia and can only add to reducing our self-esteem..

I believe the government is not willing to acknowledge its full responsibility of ensuring that the seasonal employment opportunities are made suitably available for Australian citizens, but is preferring to remain gullible before employer groups.

Senator Vanstones claim, is exaggerated and reveals a level of disregard for truth and seasonal workers that is sickening

Signed G. A. Beecroft

Cheap pickings

A GUEST foreign worker scheme is being examined for its impact on Australia's seasonal industry, such as fruit picking.

Senator Amanda Vanstone says the potential for foreign workers being exploited "could hardly be the case when the average seasonal worker earns \$60,000 a year".

I, and other seasonal workers I know, would be lucky to earn half of that.

If the average seasonal worker could earn \$60,000 a year there would be no need for guest foreign workers.

**G.A. Beecroft,
Kyabram**

Sunday Herald Sun

25 June
2006