

Resolution of Council

21 August 2023

Item 12.1

Local Council Outreach Services for Seasonal Workers

Moved by Councillor Davis, seconded by Councillor Kok -

It is resolved that Council submit the following motion for consideration at the next Local Government NSW (LGNSW) Annual Conference:

- (A) Local Government of NSW note:
- (i) the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) formerly known as Seasonal Workers Program (SWP 2008) and Pacific Labour Scheme – (PLS 2012) allows businesses across Australia (all states and territories, with exception of ACT) to hire unskilled and semi-skilled workers from nine countries in the Pacific and Timor-Leste;
 - (ii) the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme is guided by a memorandum of understanding between countries being a government-to-government program;
 - (iii) it is estimated that there are currently close to 39,000 seasonal worker nationals across Australia (as of June 2023) with 11,000 of those from the Island State of Vanuatu – the largest group from any nation;
 - (iv) seasonal workers are taxpayers aligned with other Australian citizens and an integral part of our food system; they pick and process the fresh fruit and vegetables and meat that is on our supermarket shelves and kitchen tables across the City of Sydney and other council areas across NSW;
 - (v) seasonal workers are often employed by large recruitment firms namely Approved Employers (AEs) who have responsibility for their well-being. Approved Employers rarely have good cultural connections or understanding of local communities where seasonal workers are placed;
 - (vi) farmers receiving the migrants or seasonal workers are challenged daily to provide the necessary services that are required when integrating CALD communities into the Australian workforce;

- (vii) the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Comprehensive Assessment of Regional and Sub-Regional, Labour Mobility Arrangements in the Pacific from December 2022 showed that seasonal workers face numerous ongoing systematic problems since inception of the program including:
 - (a) unsafe or inappropriate accommodation: seasonal workers are often housed in temporary living conditions that are overcrowded and well below the 'basic' Australian living standards. A lack of cost-effective transport between work and accommodation;
 - (b) a lack of access to crucial services including health, dentistry, and mental health services; culturally appropriate pastoral care and council services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities;
 - (c) failure to comply with OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) regulations; and
 - (d) lack of assistance with personal finance management, wage theft, superannuation, insurance, banking services and tax returns; and
- (viii) the 2022 review of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme and the Employer Guidelines updated in May 2023 require Approved Employers to have worker welfare embedded into their systems and practices to create positive, productive working environments:
 - (a) the review itself has not put a halt nor fixed issues and challenges that are systemic such as exploitation of workers, wage theft, poor overcrowded accommodation; and
 - (b) workers are charged exorbitant rates (\$150-190 per bed per week), overcharged for transportation, bullying and exploitation; and
- (B) Local Government NSW is requested to write to the Hon Tony Burke, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations asking the Commonwealth Government to:
 - (i) work with approved employers to provide relevant councils with information about the number of seasonal workers expected and their countries of origin so councils can understand their cultural needs, prepare the community for their arrival, and consider and plan for their needs as part of their Local Emergency Management Plans;
 - (ii) increase the frequency of check-ins by the Australian Government particularly to ensure living conditions meet the requirements outlined in the PALM Scheme Approved Employer Guidelines; and
 - (iii) provide direct funding to councils to establish dedicated local service hubs to provide seasonal workers with targeted programs, including by:
 - (a) connecting seasonal workers with First Nations or traditional owners and other cultural authorities of the area;

- (b) providing culturally appropriate and non-biased Pastoral care through Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI), Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Pacific and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) community organisations that demonstrate a deep knowledge of culture and the seasonal worker program and its people;
- (c) developing pathways and support outreach programs that connect seasonal workers to organisations that centre on the needs of migrants to assist workers to access culturally sensitive assistance to access relevant information, health and mental health; and
- (d) working closely with law enforcement authorities in respective councils to educate seasonal workers about law and order and council regulations.

Carried unanimously.

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