



QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION

Review of Regional Migration Settings

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The united voice of
Queensland agriculture

Contents page

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation.....	2
Submission	2
Introduction	2
Regional vs Rural	3
Occupation lists.....	3
Migration worker welfare	4
Encouraging Regional migration	4
Summary	5

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Department of Department of Home Affairs

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Our members

- Canegrowers
- Cotton Australia
- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- eastAUSmilk
- Australian Cane Farmers Association
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallowa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation



The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

We are a member-based organisation representing the interests of peak agriculture industry organisations, both state and national. Through our members QFF represents more than 13,000 primary producers across the cotton, sugarcane, horticulture, dairy, nursery and garden, poultry, eggs, pork, and intensive animal industries.

We unite the sector to engage in a broad range of economic, social, environmental, and regional issues through advocacy, policy development, and project activity. We work with the government of the day on behalf of industry, farmers, and the community to provide powerful representation and contribution to the policy direction, sustainability, and future growth of Queensland's agriculture sector.

Our Council of member representatives and policy committees set the strategic priorities for policy development and advocacy, while our Board ensures our corporate governance.

QFF draws on the expertise and industry knowledge of our members and through our commitment to collaboration and considered policy development, we lead Queensland's agriculture sector towards a strong future, ensuring our members are ahead of the game and have a voice at the table on the issues that matter to their members.

Submission

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Review of Regional Migration Settings.

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Introduction

QFF supports the eight key actions outlined in the "Supporting Strong and Sustainable Regions" migration discussion paper and commends the department for addressing process complexities identified in previous consultations.

While migration settings have had some impact to date, they require further consideration to properly aid in addressing the nation's workforce shortage. It is crucial to recognise the variability and diversity of needs not only across different regional, rural and remote areas of Australia, but also across the different industries within those areas, that rely upon these schemes.

Even within the agricultural industry, sectors differ on workforce needs. Horticulture, for example, is inherently seasonal, with fluctuating demands for labour throughout the year. Therefore, overall, it is crucial for the agricultural industry to have access to workers with skills that are transferable across various tasks and sectors. All industries will have these varying intricacies and addressing these

workforce challenges will require tailored strategies that account for the unique needs of these various regions and industries.

This discussion paper presents a valuable opportunity to inform a strategic workforce framework, to better help enhance the economic and social sustainability of Australia's regions. QFF have drafted the below recommendations in response to the discussion questions to help shape policies that support the agricultural sector and other key industries, fostering strong, vibrant, and resilient regional communities.

Regional vs Rural

The definitions of regional and rural areas are not clear and exacerbate confusion across migration legislation. QFF welcome a review of what constitutes regional vs rural areas across migration settings, as the current criteria for these zones are unclear, with differing definitions across the PALM scheme and various migration legislation. A one size fits all, unified definition of these terms for regional visas will not work. The ability for these areas to be flexibly defined is important in order to cater to different region's workforce needs appropriately, in a targeted and effective manner. This is not to say that the standardisation of these definitions across the various migration schemes and legislation would not be encouraged, once agreed upon after consultation with stakeholders.

QFF support a tiered approach to defining regional and rural areas, which categorises areas based upon specific demographic criteria. These tiers need to consider employment rates, key industries within the region, together with population trends, existing infrastructure and accessibility. It is imperative that these definitions are informed and formulated using the most current data, which reflects the recent feedback from key industries upon workforce shortages and pressure points within the supply chain. Any potential new definition framework must be informed with input from local governments, communities and key industry leaders within those regions.

Occupation lists

QFF support the introduction of a Regional Occupation List (ROL) alongside the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL). The Regional Occupation List can help address specific skill shortages in smaller regional and rural areas that are not adequately covered by the CSOL. QFF acknowledges that it is important that the current 500 list ROL is narrowed to rid of unnecessary job listings, in order to be useful and function successfully alongside CSOL. Better defining regional and rural areas (as stated above) and the collation of the data that will follow, will aid in tailoring the current Regional Occupation List to the unique needs of each region whilst not undermining the CSOL.

Conducting current and projected skills analysis in each region to identify ebbs and flows of shortages will be crucial. QFF underlines the need for intensive labour market analysis that deeply consults industry stakeholders, including future predictive trends for booming industries specific to each area. Rising trends in new technology, renewables, and infrastructure, and how the region is progressing in these areas, will determine which industries boom and how the landscape changes over time, and must also be considered moving forward with migration settings.

Migration worker welfare

QFF support a national workforce free of exploitation. Recent discussions with industry has shown the need for a cultural change and support to build relationships between industry leaders, union representatives and workers. While the matter of exploitation is multifaceted and can be defined in a number of ways, there are some general measures which can be applied to address concerns. This will include preparing Working Holiday Makers through improved education on their workplace rights, pathways of issue escalation and reporting options. Workers need to feel empowered to come forward as well as safe to come forward without retribution (this must include anonymous complaint services). QFF refer to the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy (NAWS) 2020 which included a number of recommendations for the federal government in regards to exploitation. Many of these recommendations already address the scope of the exploitation section within this discussion paper. Some of these general strategies can include:

- I. Improved reporting mechanisms: better communication around assistance networks available and how and where they can reach out to get help and advice if needed.
- II. Strike a balance between enforcing regulations and increasing workplace inspections, while also fostering education and productive discussions across the workforce. This may include a register of employers who have breached exploitation laws and policies (NAWS 2020).
- III. Support services to aid in supporting language barriers, which has been shown to be a common point surrounding worker exploitation.
- IV. Improved induction processes for workers: Provide comprehensive information to Working Holiday Makers before they arrive in Australia about their rights, expected working conditions, and how to seek help. This may also include implementing mandatory orientation sessions upon arrival for all businesses (as recommended in NAWS 2020), to ensure workers are educated on their rights and available support services. It is equally important that employers and employees are supported to develop positive relationships and that education, awareness and support both employers and employees in striving for positive, productive and safe workplaces.

Encouraging Regional migration

To incentivise Working Holiday Makers without tying benefits directly to their visas, benefits need to be linked to improving the regions and enhancing the quality of life outside of work. To do this the department needs to refocus on:

- Community: Implement social programs and events to facilitate community integration and establish mentorship programs to help introduce workers to the wider community.
- Health and Wellbeing: Ensure access to health services, including mental health support.
- Travel and Experience: Provide travel subsidies for Working Holiday Makers who choose to work in multiple regional locations, allowing them to explore different parts of Australia. As a vast nation with many rural and remote regions, Australia must provide special considerations for remote and very remote areas.
- Skill Development Opportunities: Provide training and skill development programs to enhance the career prospects of Working Holiday Makers. This aids in upskilling migrant workers, helping industries access a more versatile workforce and enabling workers to take on various roles i.e. seasonal horticultural work.

- Infrastructure: To maximise the benefits of attracting immigrants to regional areas, investment in infrastructure such as communication networks and transportation is important.
- Government initiatives and programs promoting the opportunity to consider migration, actively promotes consideration of the regions and this is reinforced by associated images, media, narratives that showcase the regions and not just capital cities and beach locations, as is currently the case.

Successfully attracting more migrants to Australia as a work destination will be intrinsically linked to improvements in housing and infrastructure, technological advancements, and opportunities for skill diversification. While this will require funding and resources, it will be necessary to make meaningful progress in addressing Australia's workforce shortage crisis.

Summary

The Review of Regional Migration Settings initiates important discussions surrounding the current regional rural workforce schemes and policies. Defining many of the terms discussed within the paper such as regional, rural and exploitation, will be a vital first step in efficiently tackling the workforce challenges discussed. QFF submits that both policy and solutions need to be tailored region to region in order to cater properly to the industry and community needs of these regions (both regional, rural and remote) in an impactful manner. QFF also reiterates the need to support both employers and employees in building positive relationships and effectively working together to build positive, productive and safe workplaces.

Yours sincerely

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