



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE RURAL & REGIONAL LIBERALS

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Rural and Regional Liberals Demand Action on Working Holiday Visa Delays

Farmers face growing uncertainty ahead of harvest as regional workforce concerns intensify

The Federal Parliamentary Rural and Regional Liberals, chaired by the Federal Member for O'Connor, Rick Wilson MP, are calling on the Albanese Government to urgently address growing concerns over delays and uncertainty in the Working Holiday Maker visa program, warning the consequences could be felt across agriculture, tourism and regional communities nationwide.

Regional Liberal MPs say farmers and business owners are increasingly contacting their local federal representatives concerned that backpackers they were expecting to arrive for harvest and summer work may not arrive in time, or at all.

The committee said confidence in the system was rapidly eroding.

"Across regional Australia, growers are telling us they are anxious about where their workforce is going to come from this harvest."

"Many of these workers are experienced agricultural workers, including many young Europeans who play an important role in helping producers get crops off the ground and into export markets."

The Rural and Regional Liberals are concerned by reports that Working Holiday Maker (WHM) visa applications have slowed significantly following changes affecting applicants from 24 countries and the apparent de-prioritisation of some visa streams.

This follows a directive from the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, Tony Burke, in August who confirmed that WHM visas were being handled "more slowly than they were previously" but failed to provide further information about the reason for the slowdown.

Businesses and prospective workers alike have been left frustrated by a lack of clarity around processing arrangements, with many reporting application timeframes far longer than those historically experienced. MPs have also been approached by growers concerned that, as far as they can determine, approvals for Subclass 417 Working Holiday Maker visas have slowed dramatically since July.

The committee said farmers need certainty ahead of one of the most important periods of the agricultural calendar.

"We are hearing concerns from right across regional Australia that workers who would previously have received visa approvals relatively quickly are now facing lengthy delays and uncertainty."

"The Government needs to explain what has changed, what resources are being allocated to processing these applications and what steps are being taken to ensure businesses can access workers before harvest gets underway."

The concerns come at a time when farmers are already grappling with rising input costs, ongoing labour shortages, biosecurity challenges, increased regulation and seasonal pressures.

The committee said the issue had been compounded by Labor's decision to abolish the Agriculture Visa introduced by the former Coalition Government.

"The Coalition recognised that regional Australia faces unique workforce challenges and sought to create a dedicated pathway to support the agricultural sector."

"That pathway was scrapped, and now farmers are once again facing uncertainty about whether they will have the workers they need when they need them."

The impact extends well beyond agriculture.

Working Holiday Makers are a major source of labour for hospitality, tourism and retail businesses throughout regional Australia, particularly during the busy summer period when coastal communities experience a significant influx of visitors.

"These workers don't just help bring in harvests. They work in cafes, restaurants, shops, accommodation providers and tourism businesses that keep regional communities vibrant."

"At the same time, they spend money locally, support small businesses and contribute to the economic life of the towns they call home during their stay."

The committee said regional Australia was not asking for special treatment, but for a Government that understands what is at stake.

"The industries sounding the alarm today are the same industries that help power the Australian economy."

"Our grain sector alone is worth between \$21 billion and \$27 billion annually and produces an average of around 64 million tonnes of grain each year. It is one of Australia's great export success stories and a pillar of regional prosperity."

"Alongside agriculture, Australia's world-class tourism industry relies on seasonal workers to support the small businesses, hospitality venues and tourism operators that welcome millions of visitors to regional communities every year."

"Yet while farmers prepare for harvest and regional businesses prepare for the summer tourism season, they are being left in the dark about whether the workforce they depend on will be allowed to enter the country in time."

"The Minister must come clean on the impact of changes affecting applicants from 24 countries, explain the apparent de-prioritisation of Working Holiday Maker visas, and outline what action is being taken to ensure regional industries are not left short of workers."

"The Coalition's Agriculture Visa recognised that regional Australia has unique workforce needs. Labor scrapped that solution and now owes farmers and regional businesses an explanation."

"The choice for the Government is simple: back regional Australia or risk undermining the industries that feed the nation, generate billions in export earnings and support thousands of jobs."

"Minister, it's time to back the farmers who grow our food, the businesses that keep regional communities alive and the tourism operators who showcase the best of Australia to the world."

"Back regional Australia before harvest begins. The economic consequences of getting this wrong will be felt far beyond the farm gate."

ENDS

Rick Wilson MP – Federal Member for O'Connor, WA

Melissa Price MP – Federal Member for Durack, WA

Ben Small MP – Federal Member for Forrest, WA

Tony Pasin MP – Federal Member for Barker, SA

Tom Venning MP – Federal Member for Grey, SA

Scott Buchholz MP – Federal Member for Wright, QLD

Senator Slade Brockman – Senator for WA

Senator Jess Collins – Senator for NSW



TOM VENNING MP

Member for Grey



Quotes attributable to Tom Venning Member for Grey

"Labor cannot continue to make decisions in Canberra without understanding the impact they have on the people who actually produce our food, run our businesses and keep regional South Australia moving."

"South Australian farmers and regional businesses need workers, not more uncertainty from Canberra."

"Working Holiday Makers play a critical role in regional South Australia. They drive our chaser bins, help get our harvests off the ground, pick our fruit and keep regional pubs, cafes, accommodation and tourism businesses running."

"These hardworking businesses are already dealing with rising costs, red tape and regional neglect. The last thing they need is Labor throwing another roadblock in their way."

"If Labor wants South Australian farmers and growers to keep producing, exporting and employing people, it needs to stop making it harder for them to get the workers they need."

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