

MEDIA RELEASE

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DON'T TURN OFF THE TAP! INDUSTRY UNITES OVER WORKING HOLIDAY MAKER RESTRICTIONS

Four major industry bodies are standing together to call on the Australian Government to urgently restore access to Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) as soon as possible, warning that restricting the flow of these workers is crippling Australian businesses ahead of the peak summer season.

Recent changes to the Working Holiday Maker program have seen Working Holiday (subclass 417) visas processed more slowly, while applications for Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visas have been paused for 24 partner countries.

The Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF), National Farmers' Federation (NFF), Accommodation Australia (AA), and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) are collectively urging the Government to clarify its intent for the future of the WHM program and consult meaningfully with affected industries, with growing delays and pauses putting businesses, regional economies and future visitor demand at risk.

For industries that rely heavily on seasonal and temporary workers, WHMs play a critical role in keeping businesses operating, particularly during peak periods when local labour supply cannot meet demand.

TTF CEO Margy Osmond said that WHMs are not just critical to addressing workforce shortages but also drive significant visitor spending across the country as we head into our peak summer travel season.

"If the Government is looking for a reason why Working Holiday Makers matter to Australia, I can give them a very simple answer: \$4.4 billion. That is what these visitors spent in Australia last year. Not just in our capital cities but across regional areas.

"These are high-value international visitors who are not just filling workforce gaps but are booking accommodation, eating out, taking tours and travelling around the country. And Australia has spent years trying to attract these young travellers in a highly competitive global environment.

"So, our message to the Government is clear. Please turn the tap back on."

"Each day we slow the arrival of Working Holiday Makers, we put more pressure on businesses already struggling to find workers and risk sending valuable visitor spending elsewhere. What

we stand to lose is far greater than the cost of a visa. And if we make it harder for these travellers to choose Australia, we should not be surprised if they choose somewhere else.”

National Farmers’ Federation CEO Mike Guerin said, “Working Holiday Makers are essential to maintaining Australia’s food and fibre production, filling around one in seven farm jobs nationally and helping farmers get crops harvested.

“By restricting access to this workforce, the consequences don’t stop at the farm gate. They are already being felt in regional communities and supply chains and before long, they will be felt at the checkout. Food insecurity will plague even more Australian consumers.

“These changes are also creating health and safety risks for farmers and workers who are juggling unsustainable workloads.”

Accommodation Australia CEO James Goodwin said, “Working Holiday Makers are highly valued workers who are motivated and mobile, filling workforce shortages where flexibility is needed to meet seasonal demands.

“When you take those workers out of the system, something has to give. For accommodation businesses, that means more pressure on existing staff, limiting what they can offer and making it harder to take advantage of periods when demand is strongest.

“We should be making it easier for accommodation businesses to say yes to more visitors, not putting another roadblock in the way. Australia has a world-class tourism product, but we need to make sure businesses have the workforce to deliver it.”

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO Andrew McKellar called on the Federal Government to hear the voices of Australian business and reverse the go-slow on worker visas.

“Australia's pubs, cafes, farms and tourism operators are desperate for staff. Working Holiday Makers help fill that gap and keep Australia in business. Slowing their visas may artificially reduce a migration number, but it just makes skills shortages worse. It makes doing business harder and will damage our economy.”

"Go-slows in visa processing is terrible policy, unannounced delays put all the uncertainty on business compounding stress and making planning impossible.

"Business is not asking for a free-for-all on Working Holiday Makers. We want a program businesses can properly plan around. An arbitrary pause with no warning and no certainty ahead of the busiest period for many of these businesses of the year is just unacceptable."

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