



National
Farmers
Federation

AUSVEG



Australian
Dairy Farmers

01 April 2021

Ms Anna Lutz
Assistant Secretary, Skilled Visa
Department of Home Affairs
By Email: Anna.Lutz@homeaffairs.gov.au

Dear Ms Lutz

LABOUR AGREEMENT – AGRIBUSINESS SECTOR

As representatives of the pork, dairy, and horticulture industries, we write to you in relation to the skilled migration program and industry labour agreements.

As you will be aware, skilled overseas workers make-up a small but critical part of the agricultural labour force. As such, visa programs which enable farm businesses to engage those workers are vital to our sector, and it is essential that the programs function rationally and expeditiously. Unfortunately, we are frequently contacted by our members with concerns regarding the processing of visa applications. And although we've heard numerous stories of decision making which is inconsistent and capricious, our larger concern is with respect to the time which the decisions take to be made.

We understand that these are complex matters. It is important that decisions are correct, and that these things take time. Nonetheless, reports of it taking many, many months from lodging an application to first hearing from the Department are far from isolated and difficult to excuse — when agriculture is identified as priority industry — and is especially frustrating where the application is ultimately denied. In the context of labour agreements, this concern is particularly disappointing given that the agreements have been developed with the Department over a course of months, sometimes years, and should have navigated policy and political concerns 'up front' and before applications are even lodged. These delays have significant business impact. Farms are biological and seasonal systems which cannot and do not wait on the demands of the bureaucracy. Too often we hear of agricultural enterprises culling animals or shelving expansion plans because they are unable to source the right worker. The impact of just one full time employee being unable to

start work can be significant. At the industry level, timely access to labour is a key enabler of the food production system. At the enterprise level, such delays can be catastrophic.

As such, we write to you to enquire what the Department's base line expectations are for processing applications. That is, do you have internal guidelines for contacting stakeholders, providing feedback, and making decisions? Can you please advise whether the delegates have deliverables or performance indicators in respect of timeliness, what they are, and how they are delivering on those expectations?

We look forward to your response. If you have any questions or require any clarification, we can be contacted on 02 6269 5666 and at brogers@nff.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' with a diagonal line through it, followed by a horizontal stroke.

Ben Rogers
General Manager
NFF

Craig Hough
Director
ADF

Tyson Cattle
Manager
AUSVEG

Heidi Reid
Policy Director
APL

CC: Alex Hawke MP
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
alex.hawke.mp@aph.gov.au