



Submission

to the

Department of Home Affairs

**Supporting strong and sustainable regions Review of Regional
Migration Settings Discussion Paper – June 2024**

from the

Federal Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

July 2024

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ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have access to the services required for an equitable, affordable high-quality education, from early childhood through to tertiary and training. The member families of the Association reside and work in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of achieving access to an equitable education for their children, despite their geographic location. They often live great distances from services required to support the education of their children and therefore need specifically designed rural and remote programs that allow these children to learn, develop and thrive.

Response to questions in the Supporting strong and sustainable regions Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper – June 2024

How can the various temporary and permanent visas available to the regions work together to better meet skills needs?

and

How can we reform Working Holiday Maker program visa settings to limit exploitation, while still ensuring regional Australia can access the workers it needs?

There is a constant skills shortage in rural and remote Australia and a lack of experienced workers especially in agriculture. To work effectively and safely in agriculture, a very high level of industry specific skills are required. Many of those seeking to complete the required 88 or 179 days of work within the specified industry of 'Plant and Animal Cultivation in Regional Australia' to gain the Working Holiday visa (subclass 417), of the Working Holiday Maker Program (WHM), do not have those specific skills required and need extensive training to be adequately prepared to work effectively in agriculture. The reality is that in many cases the 88 days is the training period, the working holiday maker most often leaves the workplace at the end of the 88 days and the business gains little benefit from that trained worker leading to a frustrating and ineffective program giving limited benefit to Australian agriculture. Flexibility to allow these Australian agricultural businesses to employ working holiday makers in all roles suitable to their skill set (not just the specified work list) would create an effective, fair and mutually beneficial program.

As it currently stands, the WHM program declares the position of a nanny or a governess on a farm to be an ineligible employment option when seeking to increase the time on Working Holiday visas. The broadening of eligible work positions within the visa regulations to include governess/nanny or au pair would mean already competent agricultural workers, who are currently supervising children at home in a childcare role and teaching distance education in the home schoolroom, could return to the workforce, which would achieve the desired aim of an increase in skilled workers actively engaged in agriculture in rural and remote Australia. This would result in the skilled agricultural workers working in their area of expertise and allow a working holiday maker to also work within their skills, knowledge and ability areas leading to more harmonious and effective agricultural workplaces.

Due to the restrictive job criteria of the WHM program, many capable applicants are not applying for childcare or education related positions in rural areas when needing employment counting towards extensions to their visas leaving geographically isolated families and children with a very limited pool of applicants for the childcare and home tutoring positions.

Many foreign teachers are willing to come and supervise in the distance education classroom in rural and remote areas. If this could qualify them for their visa extension under the 'Specific Work' list, it would open up the opportunities for more families to have their children's education facilitated by qualified teachers which would only serve to improve the delivery of distance education in these rural and remote households.

Should there be a regional occupation list?

The Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) Visa was established in March 2018 to support businesses in addressing genuine skill shortages, particularly in rural and remote areas. ICPA (Aust) support an occupation list to ensure that the areas of skill shortage are catered for however the current skills list does not include all the relevant skill shortages. Skilled Early Childhood teachers, Primary and Middle School teachers, Private Tutors, Regional Education Managers and Child Care Centre managers are all on the approved occupation list for the TSS subclass 482 which provides evidence that these skills are lacking in rural and remote Australia which supports this request to add these roles to the Working Holiday Maker visa (subclass 417) Plant and Animal Cultivation in Regional Australia specified industry work list.

ICPA (Aust) seeks:

Changes to the Working Holiday visa (subclass 417) of the Working Holiday Maker Program (WHM) to include, as eligible employment, the positions of governess, nanny or au pair for Working Holiday visa holders intending to complete the required 88 or 179 days of work within the specified industry of 'Plant and Animal Cultivation in Regional Australia'.

Aim of this review is to create a clear direction and objectives for regional migration by providing the flexibility to cater for needs of regional Australia. This request from ICPA (Aust) would meet objectives in the following ways

1. Raising living standards through supporting the unique skills needs of the regions

One of the unique skills needs of the regions, is caring for children and teaching in distance education classrooms. Agricultural families need support to educate their children in rural and remote areas and if the Working Holiday Maker program allowed for this skill requirement families' needs would be better supported leading to better living standards.

2. Ensuring a fair go in the workplace by making sure that visa settings do not contribute to migrant worker exploitation and support the wages and conditions of regional workers.

If working holiday makers can work in their current skill areas, they will make a valuable contribution to agricultural business leading to mutually beneficial work conditions. A program that forces working holiday makers to work in environments in which they need full supervision and training, creates frustration, lack of achievement and inefficiencies that are not mutually beneficial and in some cases leads to exploitation.

3. Building stronger communities by planning for regional migration and giving all communities the opportunity to benefit from migration.

Educated communities are strong communities. Rural and remote families need support in educating their children or they're forced to move away to a larger urban areas to seek that education. Allowing governesses and nannies on the specified work list for the working holiday maker program would provide that educational support to allow families to remain working productively in agriculture.

4. Strengthening Australia's international relationships by using regional migration settings to support stronger international relationships and connect Australia's regions with our international partners.

If working holiday makers are able to gain their visa extensions by working in areas suitable to their skill set and training, they can make a valuable contribution to that particular business in

rural and remote Australia. As the current system stands, many working holiday makers are forced to work in areas in which they have little to no skill set or knowledge, leading to inefficiencies and frustrations. Implementation of the recommendation above from ICPA (Aust) would create a program where holiday makers are valued in their workplaces as their contribution will be authentic and tangible, building positive outcomes for international relationships.