

AUSTRALIAN PORK LIMITED

Consultation on Skilled Migration Occupation Lists

Submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection

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I. Industry Overview

I.1 Australian Pork Limited

Australian Pork Limited (APL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) on reforms to Australia's temporary employer-sponsored skilled migration programme – the abolition and replacement of the 457 visa.

APL is the national representative body for Australian pork producers. APL is a producer-owned not-for-profit company combining marketing, export development, research and innovation and policy development to assist in securing a profitable and sustainable future for the Australian pork industry.

I.2 Contribution of the Pork Industry in Australia

Pork is the most consumed meat globally, and the second most consumed meat in Australia.¹ As such, pig meat – whether consumed as fresh pork, sausages, bacon, ham, or other smallgoods – is a substantial component of our national diet.

Due to Australia's biosecurity rules restricting the import of pork from overseas, one hundred percent of the fresh pork consumed in Australia is domestically grown and produced. The domestic industry plays a vital role in ensuring pork supplies and contributing to Australia's food security.

Australia's domestic sow herd numbers around 286,000 animals, housed across 2,700 registered sites nationwide. In 2016-17, the industry produced around 397,000 metric tonnes of pork, an increase of 5.2 percent compared to 2015-16.² Of this, around ten percent is exported.

The pork industry, including pig production, primary processing, secondary processing and wholesale, contributes approximately \$5.2 billion in gross domestic product to the Australian economy.³ The industry is based in regional Australia, with the largest contributions to gross state product in Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia, respectively.

The industry supports more than 36,000 jobs nationally.⁴

Globally, Australia's pig industry is small. But we are leaders in science, sustainability, and social responsibility.

I.3 Science

The modern pig industry is highly technical, specialised, and dynamic. Over the last few decades, industry productivity has been increasing steadily, more than doubling since the mid-1970s⁵. The productivity increase has been accompanied by advances in science and technical innovation.

For example, industry collaboration with APL and funding from AusIndustry enabled the development of PorkScan - a unique ultrasound-based pig carcass-grading tool. This technology is currently being commercialised. Industry's strategy for PorkScan includes a continual investment model, guaranteeing ongoing development of the technology and adding supplementary functionalities through add-on components.

Physi-Trace® is the Australian pork industry's world-leading traceability tool. The technology applies leading-edge forensic chemistry technology to the task of identifying whether the sample is Australian

¹ ABARES *Agricultural commodities: March quarter 2017*

² Australian Pork Limited *Year in Review 2016–2017*

³ ACIL Allen Consulting *Economic Contribution Report: Pork Industry in Australia 2015-16*

⁴ ACIL Allen Consulting *Economic Contribution Report: Pork Industry in Australia 2015-16*

⁵ Productivity Commission, *Inquiry into Pigmear Safeguards*, March 2008

or not, the farm source of targeted pork samples – as well as an ability to verify claims such as free range or gestation stall free.

As a part of the pork industry's Pork Supply Chain Integrity Program (PSCIP), Physi-Trace® will have significant value to the industry for improving the management of potential exotic disease outbreaks, validating the origin of pork where labelling fraud is suspected and maintaining market access in times of possible future safety concerns.

Physi-Trace® is the envy of Australian red meat producers, who have no correspondingly advanced traceability technology. Similarly, global pork producers have expressed significant interest in acquiring the technology to support their domestic food safety and traceability efforts.

1.4 Sustainability

The Australian pork industry is at the forefront in adopting sustainable practices and technologies.

The pork sector was one of the first industries to develop a methane destruction methodology for piggeries as part of the Government's Carbon Farming Initiative. The industry has a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1 kg CO₂-e per kg of pork produced.

With the continual rise of energy costs and the Australian pork industry's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, investing in biogas has proven to be a viable business option as well as offering an environmental benefit. Currently, 13.5 percent of total Australian pork production is sourced from farms with biogas systems implemented. The potential for additional uptake is significant. The technology is economically viable for piggeries with more than 500 sows.

APL was chosen as the lead agency in the Federal Government's Rural R&D for Profit project 'Waste to Revenue: Novel Fertilisers and Feeds' worth \$2 million. The project, being carried out by University of Queensland and University of Western Australia, aims to develop new waste technologies that utilise algae, purple phototrophic bacteria, and chemotrophs to recapture nutrients in waste as fertiliser and feed products.

1.5 Social Responsibility

Our industry is committed to reflecting the values of Australian society. In recent years, this has included managing our environmental impact (as outlined above), and being proactive in the development of rigorous standards for animal welfare.

The industry invests millions of dollars each year to research new technologies and practices to improve pig welfare, and provide valuable education and training to stockpersons throughout Australia. The Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Pigs outlines minimum standards for the welfare of pigs on farms.

The Code provides a foundation for animal welfare legislation, and has been regulated in each state, making it legally enforceable. All stockpersons working with pigs are required under state government regulations to be competent to maintain the health and welfare of the animals in their care, or under the direct supervision of a competent stockperson.

As an industry, we have taken a world-leading position by voluntarily committing to phase out the use of gestation stalls, meaning that sows will not be confined in sow stalls from five days after they are last mated until one week before farrowing, when they are moved into piglet protection pens. This system has been adopted and implemented by pig farmers who collectively account for almost 80 percent of Australia's sows.

Four out of every five Australian sows is now loose housed – as well as a 91 percent probability they will not be housed in sow stalls at any point in time between five days after mating and one week before farrowing.

This industry-led initiative places Australia well ahead of most global pork producers in terms of welfare outcomes for animals. Only the United Kingdom and some parts of Denmark meet the Australian voluntary standards of confinement. Most of the EU has regulated a partial ban, but still permits sow stall use for up to four weeks at the start of pregnancy.

2. Labour

2.1 Profile of a Skilled Workforce

Australia's modern pork industry relies on a highly-skilled workforce. Over the years, industry consolidation has led to rising specialisation of work, corresponding with productivity increases.⁶ Indeed, the roles of workers in all livestock industries are evolving as production systems become more sophisticated with the advancement and adoption of new technology.

Pork production now requires suitably qualified people to be responsible for managing nutritionally balanced feeding operations, monitoring growth, performing artificial insemination, monitoring animal health and, in particular, animal behaviour. These duties require skills, experience and training and need to be filled by qualified workers. The industry has high demand for skilled occupations including veterinarians, nutritionists, geneticists, engineers (to maintain extensive on-farm infrastructure), artificial insemination specialists, and more.

At the very least, as summarised above, all stockpersons working with pigs must have appropriate training to ensure compliance with state animal welfare legislation. A stockperson can be considered suitably qualified in accordance with regulations if they are a veterinarian, hold a Certificate 3 in Agriculture (Pork Production) or equivalent, or have completed assessment by a Registered Training Organisation (either through training or recognition of prior learning) in:

- the movement and handling pigs;
- care for the health and welfare of pigs;
- compliance with industry animal welfare requirements; and
- administration of medication to livestock.

Our industry depends on well-trained staff to ensure both business productivity and the health and welfare of our pigs. Unfortunately, appropriately-skilled workers ready to be employed in the pig industry are difficult or impossible to source locally.

2.2 Skills Shortage

The pork industry has significant and long-standing difficulties attracting and retaining skilled piggery workers. This is compounded by the perception of the pork industry being a relatively unattractive career choice, exacerbated by the diminishing labour supply in regional Australia.

APL surveyed producers in August 2017 to better understand the industry's labour needs. In that study, 68 percent of respondents said they had vacancies in critical skilled occupations. These jobs were at all levels, from basic stockperson to farm manager. When vacancies go unfilled, producers may have insufficient staff to ensure the health and welfare of pigs, and sometimes resort to de-stocking.

Producers have great difficulty attracting workers from other parts of Australia. Pig farms are often isolated, away from centres of employment for partners, and from school facilities for children. Unsociable work hours and a perceived lack of career development opportunities also contribute to the industry's image amongst Australians as an undesirable place to work.

Ninety-four percent of respondents to APL's labour survey said that the perceived unattractiveness of the pig industry was the main impediment to recruiting Australian workers, but there were a range of factors. The following statements from producers reflect this:

⁶ Productivity Commission, *Inquiry into Piguat Safeguards*, March 2008

“(Our) region is fully employed, so in most instances you need to attract people to not only the job but also a small country town with limited work options for partners and assimilating into a community.”

“Our region is a thriving agricultural area, and it's very hard to get skilled workers locally. Many school leavers can't read and write properly, unable to pass basic aptitude tests, and those that can want to go to university.”

“We have tried to give inexperienced locals a try however on every occasion this has not been successful - they just don't have their heart in it, unreliable and have ended up being a liability to the business and bring with them a poor work ethic.”

“If we advertise for piggery workers we are never successful within Australia. In general Aussies will not work with pigs ... or relocate to [regional areas] to even try to work with pigs!!!”

“The only people that apply for work in our area have no skills and struggle to complete training programs due to levels of literacy and numeracy. Many have not completed year 12 at school and really struggle to undertake any training successfully.”

“Since my parents took on this business in the Riverina, our biggest challenge has been resourcing employable people. In our area, only 24 percent of students finish year 12 and the government shut down the local regional agricultural college (Yanco) many years ago. The local agricultural industry is thriving and also depends on 457 and 187 visa holders to make up the shortfall in skilled workers. The education and training system fails to make clear pathways for students to transition to work. Very few people are taking on apprenticeships and many of those that do take on apprenticeships or traineeships fail to complete their training.”

In addition to prospective employees' negative perception of pig production, producers also cited declining local populations (40 percent) and the lack of available skills and development training (25 percent), respectively, as leading causes of the skills shortage in the Australian pig industry.

2.3 Industry Efforts to Address Shortages

Industry has been proactive in its efforts to recruit and retain local workers. In addition to providing training for existing employees, many producers support outreach programs to attract young locals to the industry. They offer formal vocational training to existing employees, as well as work experience programs, graduate programs, and work placements for prospective employees.

Many producers have addressed the lack of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in their regions by becoming an RTO themselves. This enables them to deliver Certificate III in Pork Production, Certificate IV in Agriculture, and Diploma in Agriculture training directly to their employees.

In Western Australia, the industry has its own training body, known as Pork Industry Training WA. This body, working closely with producers across the state, has successfully trained and assessed more than one hundred employees since 2009.

APL has worked with industry to provide training support tools, such as ProHand, a program designed to modify and reinforce stockpersons' attitudes to animal welfare and handling. The Pork Cooperative Research Corporation (Pork CRC) facilitates the Roseworthy Pig Course at Adelaide University each year. The course is open to anyone in the industry, with the Pork CRC covering travel and other costs for the first 15 production-based personnel to register for the course. The course is widely acknowledged as a success, with more than 300 graduates to date, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, producers and their staff, and those in technical and advisory positions across the industry.

Roseworthy Campus also hosts a Pig Education Day, which aims to deepen school students' knowledge of the pig industry. In October 2017, twenty-five year eleven students from six schools

visited the campus to learn more about pig production and possible career paths in the industry. This included information on fourteen different careers, from piggery stockperson and livestock carrier through to livestock nutritionist and pig veterinarian. The program aims to highlight the necessary skill-set and qualifications required for each job and the nature of the work involved. We hope that by introducing students to our industry in a hands-on environment, we can help dispel negative perceptions.

Industry has embraced a wide section of the Australian community in its efforts to attract workers. For example, “Autism and Agriculture” is a world-first initiative of SunPork Farms to employ autistic adults with a high attention to detail in specialist animal care roles (see attached news article).⁷ In early 2017, seven autistic adults took up full-time positions with the company. Other producers are investigating participation in the program, following its initial success.

Respondents to APL’s labour survey offered the following comments about their efforts to address skills shortages:

“We are a Registered Training Organisation and do high-school work experience and offer part-time jobs to school leavers so [they] can work and study.”

“We offer mostly internal training with consultants and vets however if any seminars or workshops become available we do send them - however there seems to be little outside training opportunities available outside the farm.”

“We offer Diploma Animal production for those without degrees. For those with degrees we offer skills based training dependent upon performance review processes.”

“We do assessments in the workplace to assist Australian staff to pass their modules for their cert level training and it’s near on impossible to get them to complete their diploma.”

“Work experience students from high schools - none have ended coming and working. Vet student placement - none have then gone on to work in industry.”

“Certificate 3 in Pork Production is offered to all pig workers. We have two staff at the moment who are undertaking a Diploma in Pork Production. We regularly update ProHand Stock Handling courses with our pig workers. Farm employees all have a current ChemCert certificate. We have also recently had three of our stockmen in the broadacre mixed farming complete the Low Stress Stock Handling Course. We organise, and pay for the safety course for all staff who are required to hold a firearms license to meet their work obligations.”

“We offer Certificate III in Pork Production. In the past we have offered Diploma in Agriculture and Certificate IV in Agriculture. Currently working to find a provider who can deliver the Certificate IV and Diploma in Agriculture again.”

In summary, industry is proactive in reaching out to local workers, and in providing skills development opportunities for both existing and prospective employees.

However, the persistent lack of suitably qualified employees - mainly due to the perceived unattractiveness of the industry to local workers - affects both productivity and animal welfare outcomes.

The ability to source suitably skilled workers from overseas to work in positions which require technically-oriented skills is vital for pork producers to appropriately manage and grow their operations.

⁷ Brett Williamson, *Piggery Seeks Employees on Autism Spectrum for Animal Husbandry and Welfare Roles*, ABC Radio Adelaide, 1 November 2016

2.4 The Importance of Overseas Workers

The temporary skilled migration program has been an indispensable part of our industry's response to the challenge of long-term skills shortages. Reflecting this, 81 percent of respondents to APL's labour survey employ skilled workers born overseas. All respondents said the 457 visa program had been either somewhat successful or very successful in addressing on-farm skills shortages.

The key to the success of this program in our industry has been the ability for farmers to retain committed and skilled workers over the longer term through transition to permanent residency. These workers tend to stay in the pig industry and put down roots in regional Australia.

Westpork provides a good example. In 2006, the company sponsored a cohort of 12 skilled workers from the Philippines to work on its Western Australian farms. Eleven years later, ten of those workers have transitioned to permanent residency or citizenship and remain committed to the company.

This is a typical story in our industry:

"We have sponsored 5 Filipinos through 457 visas in the last seven years, all are still with us and all have achieved PR. All have brought their families and grown their families in regional country areas."

- Victorian producer with 42 full time staff

"My Filipinos have relocated to [regional South Australia] very successfully. 5 out of 7 are married with children for the local schools and have bought homes in the town. Two are still single but have only been in Australia for two and three years."

- South Australian producer with 27 full time staff

Ninety percent of respondents to APL's labour survey noted the positive impact on business productivity as a result of accessing the 457 visa program. Eighty-two percent noted improvements in staff retention overall.

"Having these 457 workers in our business has done many things for us. Helped us have a stable work force, turnover of staff is minimal even with the Australians, improved work culture, allowed us to grow our business, work cover claims are down. Living in Australia we have many challenges: feed prices, drought, pig prices. Having these 457 workers on board just allows us some surety with at least our work force. It would be better if the process of sponsorship etc for these people was made simpler."

- QLD producer with 16 full time staff, including five former 457s that have transitioned to permanency, and two current 457s.

In our industry, workers from abroad play a vital role in transferring much-needed skills to locals.

Western Australia's Milne Agrigroup used skilled migrant workers to implement and support an innovative new business model. As the company looked to expand its production of free-range pork, Milne AG brought in industry specialists from the UK. These specialists were tasked with assisting the company's network of contract farmers develop sustainable, reliably productive free-range pig-breeding operations that meet the rigorous animal-welfare, food safety and biosecurity standards demanded by customers. Many of Milne AG's farmers had limited experience in pig production. The transfer of appropriate skills from overseas workers was thus critical to the success of the contract grower model.

Our producers noted a positive impact on overall team dynamics when employing highly-skilled and committed workers from overseas:

"Their presence has helped the Australian guys to show leadership, openness to another culture for a better, diverse workplace"

- Victorian producer with 38 full time staff, including one 457 that has transitioned to permanent residency and one current 457 worker.

457 workers have all had specialised training in my industry and are highly motivated to prove themselves this has motivated local employees and demonstrated to them a more professional approach to their work which has had a very positive effect on my business performance.”

- QLD producer with 80 full time staff, including 15 that have transitioned from subclass 457 to permanent residency.

“The 457 Visa program has been very helpful to the business, many of the staff that we have employed from overseas have been placed in positions where they are supervising and mentoring younger inexperienced Australian employees. It has worked really well to balance the teams and provide experience and overall leadership to each of the teams.”

- NSW producer with 57 fulltime staff, including seven former 457 visa holders that have transitioned to permanent residency.

The vital importance of skilled migrants to Australia’s rural economy is well-documented.

A recently-completed, three-year research project into new immigrants and Australian agriculture, funded by the Australian Government’s Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC – now known as Agrifutures), reaffirmed the fact.⁸ The study found that “skilled permanent immigrants add considerably to the productivity of Australian agriculture by filling skilled vacancies in the agricultural sector and bring their expertise from their pre-immigration employment experience. Most find a job in their area of expertise, like the job, and like living regional and rural Australia”.⁹

Indeed, skilled migrants not only help sustain the Australian pig industry, they also make valuable, long-term social contributions to regional communities.

Pyramid Hill is around 85 kilometres north of Bendigo in regional Victoria. Nine years ago, the town was struggling with a declining population, leading to potential closure of vital infrastructure, including the town’s school. The dwindling local labour supply exacerbated a lack of skilled workers for pig producer Tom Smith. Overcoming the threat to his business, Tom travelled to Manila where he recruited four skilled Filipinos to come and work on his farm. Today, those workers and their families have formed the nucleus of a tremendous boost to the local economy and community. The town school and church are thriving, with the community hosting a cultural ‘fiesta’ to celebrate their renewed vitality (article attached).¹⁰

The Regional Australia Institute examined the 2016 census results and found that, for many small towns, the overseas-born are the only source of population growth.¹¹ A majority of these areas rely on primary industry for economic viability. Under such conditions, it is hard to overestimate the long-term value of skilled migrants arriving in regional towns, as summed up by the authors of the RIRDC study:

“the impact is not only on rural and regional economies and labour markets but also on rural and regional populations as new immigrants add to the vibrancy of towns, schools, and communities in the

⁸ Professor Jock Collins, Associate Professor Branka Krivokapic-Skoko, Dr Devaki Monani, *New Immigrants Improving Productivity in Australian Agriculture*, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, September 2016

⁹ Professor Jock Collins, Associate Professor Branka Krivokapic-Skoko, Dr Devaki Monani, *New Immigrants Critical to Australian Agriculture*, Farm Policy Journal vol 14 no 1 Autumn October 2017, p46

¹⁰ Larissa Romensky, *Pyramid Hill Embraces its Filipino Community*, ABC Central Victoria, 15 October 2015

¹¹ Regional Australia Institute, *Migrants are Stopping Regional Areas from Shrinking*, theconversation.com/au, 11 July 2017

bush. Immigration is the most significant antidote to the population, and skills and professional workforce decline in many parts of the Australian bush today.”¹²

Australian pig producers recognise and celebrate the special contributions of migrant workers and their families to regional areas:

“We like them to bring their families here and reside in our community. One employee and a friend has 3 daughters who have been leaders at the school and extremely popular. Our school today is multicultural and very good.”

“Our 457 workers transition to Permanent residents and then purchase homes, put their kids into the local school, get involved in the sporting clubs and spend their wages in the local community. They are a really important part of our community.”

Reflecting on his 55-year career in the Australian meat industry, the soon-to-be-retired head of Linley Valley Pork and industry stalwart, Mr Ron Penn, offered this remark: “the 457 visa workers helped to make our business more competitive on world markets, but another positive outcome from that was many children educated in WA while their parents worked for us are now entering university to study for a variety of professions.”¹³



Linley Valley's 457 visa holder program helped many people from overseas make a life in Australia as permanent residents.

The Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into Australia's Temporary Work Visa Programs in 2015 considered the views of the pork industry, summarising the situation in a few paragraphs:

3.79 The committee also heard from pork producers, Mrs Kerry Murray and Mr Bernard Murray from Murray Free Range near Cobram in Victoria, and Mrs Elizabeth Wallace from Windridge Farms in Young, NSW.

¹² Professor Jock Collins, Associate Professor Branka Krivokapic-Skoko, Dr Devaki Monani, *New Immigrants Critical to Australian Agriculture*, Farm Policy Journal vol 14 no 1 Autumn October 2017, p37

¹³ Rueben Hale, *Meat Industry Stalwart Reflects on Long Innings*, Perth Countryman, 21 December 2017 p12

3.80 Mr and Mrs Murray and Mrs Wallace recounted their difficulties in attracting suitable labour. Mrs Wallace noted that in the past year, only six out of 17 Australian and permanent resident workers had been retained, and of those six, two were Filipino permanent residents that had previously worked in other piggeries, and one was a Filipino permanent resident with no piggery experience. Of those workers that left Windridge Farms, one left because of drug issues, one resigned, and nine simply did not come to work after five days or less.

...

3.84 Both sets of farmers agreed that without the workers from the 457 visa program, their businesses simply could not survive.

3.85 Given that piggeries are looking to retain a permanent skilled workforce, Ms Kerr also noted that the pork industry is actively assisting 457 visa holders to gain permanent residency.

3.86 The transition of staff from the 457 visa program to permanent residency was confirmed by Mrs Murray. She stated that the Filipino staff currently employed on their farm were previously 457 visa holders and are all now permanent residents.¹⁴

The relevant section of the Committee's report, as well as the full transcript of Mr and Mrs Murray's and Ms Wallace's appearance before the Committee is attached to this submission for further background.

2.5 The Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement

The myriad benefits of permanent skilled migration to regional Australia, as outlined above, and the positive role played by the Australian pork industry as a responsible and genuine user of the 457 system have been acknowledged by DIBP in the form of the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement. The template agreement, negotiated between APL and the Department, was approved by the Minister in 2014.

The Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement was designed to address a number of specific issues. First, it establishes a tailored occupation category – Senior Stockperson (Piggery) – to better meet the skilled labour needs of a more diverse set of producers. This category, only available through the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement, complements the existing ANZSCO-listed occupations Pig Farmer (121318) and Agricultural Technician (311111).

Second, the template agreement offers long-term certainty for sponsors by providing a scheduled and guaranteed opportunity to apply for permanent residency under the visa subclass 186. This element of the agreement is vital to its success. It was included explicitly to address the chronic skills shortages apparent in the Australian pig production industry.

The development of this template set a precedent for Australian agriculture. Other agricultural industries with a high reliance on skilled labour, such as dairy, have followed our lead and negotiated similar template agreements. Around half of respondents to APL's labour survey employed workers under the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement.

¹⁴ The Senate Education and Employment References Committee, *A National Disgrace: the Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holders*, March 2016, pp55-57

3. Changes to the Temporary Skilled Migration Program

3.1 Impact of the Proposed Changes

The announcement of wide-ranging changes to the temporary skilled migration program in April 2017 took the Australian pork industry by surprise.

In particular, the abolishment of the subclass 457 visa, the imposition of additional fees and levies, and the disruption of the pathway to permanency for occupations on the newly-created Short Term Skilled Occupation List (STSOL) has stoked grave concerns in the Australian pork industry. Access to the 457 visa, through both the mainstream program and Pork Industry Labour Agreement, had formed a central plank of industry's efforts to address long-term skills shortages. Removing the pathway to permanency for skilled workers threatens the sustainability of our workforce and, by extension, our industry.

Respondents to APL's labour offered the following comments in relation to the changes:

"We would not be a viable piggery business without the overseas employees. We offer plenty of alternate farm work for Australian workers but we need the Filipinos to do the intense piggery husbandry."

"These workers are absolutely essential to my business. Furthermore there will be no attraction for foreign workers to come to Australia without the incentive to transition to permanent residency."

"We do not use 457 visa workers, however it could be something that has a major impact on our farm in the future if we struggle to get a reliable, local work force."

"In reality I am unsure how our farms would have survived without this program."

The potential implications for animal health and welfare of a loss of access to appropriate numbers of qualified staff are also cause for concern. For this reason, the RSPCA has supported industry efforts to recruit suitably-trained staff from overseas to fill skills gaps in the interests of maximising welfare outcomes.

Heather Neil, CEO of RSPCA, has written to Andrew Spencer, CEO of APL, expressing support for industry's efforts to restore the pathway to permanency for temporary migrants with appropriate husbandry skills. RSPCA was similarly supportive during the negotiation of the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement. Ms Neil's letter is attached for your reference.

As noted in previous sections of this submission, the benefits flowing from the temporary skilled migration program as it previously operated in the Australian pig industry are difficult to overstate. They incorporate positive impacts on business productivity, staff retention, skills transfer, animal welfare, animal health, and local community vitality. These benefits may be lost under the changes to the temporary skilled migration program.

3.2 Proposals to Address the Concerns of the Pork Industry

Australian pig producers require a stable, long-term skilled workforce in order to innovate and grow. Our pigs need appropriately-trained staff to ensure their health and welfare. Our regional communities depend on migrants to reverse declining populations and reinvigorate towns.

For these reasons, APL encourages DIBP and the Department of Employment to consider the following proposals. We believe they will help to address the concerns of our industry, without undermining the intent of the changes to the temporary skilled migration program announced in April 2017.

Proposal 1: Inclusion of the occupations Pig Farmer (121318) and Agricultural Technician (131111) on the Medium and Long Term Strategic Skills List

This would recognise the ongoing and chronic shortage of workers meeting the skill-level requirements for these positions, nationally. Inclusion on the MLTSSL would restore the pathway to permanency for these workers, providing certainty for sponsors, as well as for the visa-holders and their families.

Proposal 2: Inclusion of the occupations Pig Farmer (121318) and Agricultural Technician (131111) on the proposed regional occupations list (with eligibility for the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme)

This would acknowledge the importance of permanent skilled migrants in securing long-term economic and social benefits for regional Australia.

Proposal 3: Commitment to retain the provisions of the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement in relation to eligibility for the Employer Nomination Scheme (subclass 186) pathway to permanency

The Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement – agreed only three years ago - currently offers the best avenue to manage overseas skilled workers as part of a long-term solution to skills shortages in the pork industry. Central to this is the idea of a pathway to permanency, which provides a strong incentive for committed staff.

The current arrangements with regard to permanent residency under the template agreement are reflected on the DIBP webpage as follows:

Overseas workers can transition to a permanent visa only after they have held a subclass 457 visa, as a primary visa holder, in the occupation of 'senior stockperson (piggery)' for a minimum period of four years in each of the following circumstances:

Nominations can only be made by a pork industry employer that is a signatory to a pork industry labour agreement.

Employers can only nominate overseas workers in the occupation of 'senior stockperson (piggery)'.

Overseas workers must have the experience, qualifications and English language proficiency required under a pork industry labour agreement.

Overseas workers must be under 50 years of age at the time of nomination and visa application lodgement.

Employers will be required to continue to demonstrate ongoing labour market need, rather than simply transitioning temporary visa holders to permanent residence. Employers will also be expected to have met all sponsorship obligations, including training and recruitment obligations, throughout their current and previous labour agreement.¹⁵

The pork industry is largely satisfied with these arrangements, but would prefer to see the minimum period before transition to permanency reduced from four years to three years. Given the average processing time of around twelve months, this change would allow applicants to remain working on valid 457/TSS visas until such time as their application for permanent residency is completed.

APL has received assurances from DIBP that the basic settings of Industry Labour Agreements will be unchanged, which we understand to include arrangements for permanent residency. We

¹⁵ <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Work/Empl/Labour-agreements/pork-industry>

accept some minor changes will need to be made to bring the template agreements into alignment with the creation of the new TSS visa.

Proposal 4: Waiver of additional fees and levies for sponsors accessing the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement

Under the template agreement, sponsors are already required to pay the equivalent of at least two percent of payroll to an industry training fund, or to pay the equivalent of at least one percent of payroll expenditure on the training of Australian workers and permanent residents employed by the business.

It would be unfair to extract training funds from visa sponsors twice. The pork industry is concerned that this may occur with the requirement that sponsors contribute to the Skilling Australians Fund. While our industry is committed to addressing the skills shortage by providing resources to train local workers, this commitment is already being met under the template agreement.

APL understands that visa sponsors will have no input into how money is spent under the Skilling Australians Fund. It seems reasonable that industries contributing to the fund should benefit from its initiatives. APL would encourage the government to consider a process whereby contributing industries can have input into how their levies are allocated.

3.3 Conclusion

The pork industry is an important contributor to Australia's economy, supporting jobs and providing an irreplaceable and much-loved food for Australian consumers. The industry is modern and innovative. It is environmentally and socially responsible.

However, the industry suffers from long-term chronic shortages of the skilled workers on which it relies, undermining labour force sustainability. Industry has been proactive in its efforts to address skills shortages by supporting training and skills development, and undertaking outreach activities to attract new staff.

The temporary skilled migration program has complemented these efforts by providing access to appropriately-trained individuals from overseas. These migrants have been committed to working in Australian agriculture and living in regional Australia over the long term, incentivised by the opportunity to become permanent residents.

The Australian pork industry is concerned that removing the pathway to permanency for these workers will exacerbate the shortage of skilled labour, hurting business productivity and placing animal health and welfare at risk.

APL calls on the government to address industry concerns by restoring the pathway to permanency for the ANZCO-listed categories of Pig Farmer and Agricultural Technician and by guaranteeing the availability of a pathway to permanency for workers employed in the category Senior Stockperson (Piggery) under the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement.

We are also concerned about increases in fees and levies associated with the temporary skilled migration program and how they will be spent. APL calls on the government to reconsider the imposition of additional charges for regional users of the TSS program and the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement. APL encourages the government to consider industry views when allocating levy-payer funds to training initiatives.

This submission is supported by the National Farmers Federation and the RSPCA.

If you have any questions about this submission, please contact Mr Andrew Robertson, Senior Policy Analyst at andrew.robertson@australianpork.com.au on (02) 6270 8888.

4. Attachments

4.1 Piggery Seeks Employees on Autism Spectrum for Animal Husbandry and Welfare Roles



Piggery seeks employees on autism spectrum for animal husbandry and welfare roles

ABC Radio Adelaide By Brett Williamson

Updated Tue 1 Nov 2016, 10:15am

What was seen as a hurdle is now a prerequisite as companies see the benefits of employing workers who are on the autism spectrum.

Information technology and cyber security organisations have discovered employees with autism are perfect for high attention to detail roles.

And in what is believed to be a world-first for the agricultural industry, Sunpork Farms has advertised for eight animal husbandry and welfare positions — but as a prerequisite, applicants must provide medical proof that they are on the autism spectrum.

Dr Robert van Barneveld, managing director and group CEO for Sunpork Farms, said this unusual recruitment decision was made after seeing the success of other Specialisterne projects.

Dr van Barneveld consulted with the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) and then developed the Autism and Agriculture CRC.

"Prior to embarking on this program we'd had a number of industry workshops about priorities, and investing in people with a high attention to detail was one," Dr van Barneveld said.

"We've found a way that we might be able to accommodate that in quite an innovative way."

Tech giants already on board

Technology companies Hewlett Packard, Microsoft and Google currently seek out employees on the spectrum for IT and software testing positions.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has also sought out people with autism for specific roles in the past.

But Dr van Barneveld said to his knowledge this type of targeted recruitment for animal husbandry roles had not been done anywhere else in the world.

"These are specialist positions that we are putting in place — they'll be filled by the best candidates and paid a full wage for the job they have been employed to do," Dr van Barneveld said.

Dr van Barneveld said it made good business sense to seek out employees who were focussed, comfortable with routine and eager to work.

"This is by no means a charitable exercise," he said.



PHOTO: Job seekers with autism are being sought for animal husbandry roles at Sunpork Farms. (ABC News)

MAP: Adelaide 5000

Autism at a glance

- ASD is a group of neurobiological disorders affecting a person's communication and social abilities
- ASD affects about one in 160 children, with boys four times more likely to be affected than girls
- Symptoms are different in each person affected but can include repetitive behaviours, difficulty relating to people, and sensitivity to stimulation including touch, sounds and sight
- Symptoms can appear as early as the first year of life
- There is no cure but can be managed with appropriate and early intervention
- Genetic and environmental factors are being investigated as the cause which as yet is undetermined
- The rates of ASD are the same in both vaccinated and non-vaccinated populations

ABC Health and Wellbeing

He said so far five people with autism had been recruited for positions in the boning room and "that is working out very, very well".

He said the hardest part of introducing the program to date was limiting the opportunity to just eight people.

Genuine diversity program

Autism SA CEO Jenny Karavolos said it was an exciting time for people with autism who were seeking work.

"We talk about, in other organisations, diversity and inclusion — this is a genuine attempt at recognising that everyone has something to contribute," she said.

Ms Karavolos said with autism becoming the fastest growing diagnosed disability in Australia, it made sense to develop targeted recruitment programs such as this one.

"It's not about being autistic; it's about recognising the best use of someone's skills," she said.

"This is not a token gesture of employment."

Dr van Barneveld said all eight roles were expected to be filled by early 2017.

The company also plans to share their experiences with other industries interested in recruiting people with autism.

Topics: autism-spectrum-disorder, pig-production, animals, adelaide-5000

First posted Tue 1 Nov 2016, 10:13am



PHOTO: Five people have been employed in animal welfare positions already. (Landline: ABC TV)

4.2 Pyramid Hill Embraces its Filipino Community

15 October, 2015 6:49PM AEDT

Pyramid Hill embraces its Filipino community

By Larissa Romensky

Pyramid Hill is home to a growing Filipino community, with many working at the nearby piggeries.



Marilyn Fernandez works in the farrowing area looking after sows and their piglets. "I'm thinking of my children's future," she said. (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)



Richard Fernandez described his first impressions of the landscape near Pyramid Hill as "beautiful, green and quiet". (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)



Helen Garchitorena is studying her Masters in Sustainable Agriculture by distance education. (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)



Frederick 'Eric' Estrella said he spent the first few months overcoming homesickness for his family. (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)



Eight-year-old Toby and his brother, 12-year-old Elijah, at St Patrick's Primary School in Pyramic y playing basketball. (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)

More than 100 Filipinos now call the small town, 86km north of Bendigo, home, bringing a much needed population boost to the community.

"You can imagine the difference that that's made in filling the church pews, boosting the numbers in the schools and keeping those sporting clubs viable," councillor Cheryl McKinnon said.

Cr McKinnon said the local economy also benefitted, with people renting and buying houses, and the local gift shop stocking Asian food supplies.

"They live and work in the community and so their wages stay in the community," she said.

The first four Filipinos arrived seven years ago after local piggery owner Tom Smith travelled to Manila to interview staff.

Mr Smith said the calibre of worker was not available locally to work in the industry.

"A lot of the people we bring over on 457s are either qualified vets in the Philippines or they've done a Bachelor of Ag or whatever," Mr Smith said.

"They're all quite well educated guys. We don't get that type of person available over here to do the task that we want."

Mr Smith now mainly recruits through word of mouth, and of his 35 full-time staff, 21 are Filipino, looking after 26,000 pigs.

Husband and wife

Marilyn Fernandez was part of the first group of four Filipinos to arrive at the piggery seven years ago.

Married with five children at the time, she arrived ahead of her family and spent seven months living alone on-site in a caravan.

"For two weeks I was crying, then every night I was talking with my husband and kids - it was hard," she said, crying.

In the Philippines Mrs Fernandez worked as supervisor at various piggeries for about seven years, living on-site and visiting her family on weekends.

About three times per year she was quarantined for about a month at a time during an outbreak of disease.

Her husband, Richard Fernandez, worked as a company auditor before arriving with their two youngest children a year later.

He also works at the piggery, responsible for a variety of tasks including managing the mill area and driving trucks and forklifts.

"It's hard but you need to accept the reality, as long as my kids are happy and I'm happy here - it doesn't matter," he said.

The driving force for both of them leaving their home was to provide a better life for their children.

"Even though you finish your university and you've been a professional, your salary is not enough having six kids," Mr Fernandez said.

The couple saved enough money to eventually bring over their three older children.

Mr Fernandez said when he first arrived in Pyramid Hill it had been a culture shock.

"You're not used to this English dialect. They speak really quickly and you can't really understand what they're talking about," he said.

Mr Fernandez schooled himself in episodes of Home and Away to familiarise himself with the Australian language.

The couple has now bought a house in town, and Ms Fernandez is part of the organising committee for the **town's first cultural fiesta**.

The vet

Frederick 'Eric' Estrella was also part of the first group to arrive at the piggery. Originally from a crowded province two hours from Manila, he took time to adjust to the isolation of his new setting, spending the first few months overcoming homesickness.

"Every night we tried to console ourselves that we are doing this for our family," he said.

Trained as a veterinarian and working in a piggery in the Philippines, Mr Estrella also came to Pyramid Hill for a better-paying job to look after his family.

He works as one of the leading hands at the intensive pig farm, training and supervising other staff.

He said he felt comfortable and safe in his new home and had adjusted to the quiet way of life where most of the people knew each other.

"I feel like I'm at home in this place, especially when my family arrived here," Mr Estrella said.

The Masters student

Helen Garchitorea arrived in Pyramid Hill two years ago, followed by her husband and four children a few months later.

She has found it interesting learning the new culture, especially the food, language and people.

Previously she worked as a company veterinarian, working with small farmers to maintain their livestock.

Now she works in the farrowing area looking after sows and their piglets, and is studying her Masters in Sustainable Agriculture by distance education.

She left the Philippines because of the high cost of living, especially around higher level schooling and food.

"But here even with this kind of job, your salary versus your cost of living will be sufficient, so I think that's the main difference," she said.

The teacher and her students

Mr and Mrs Fernandez's son Elijah was five-years-old and one of the first Filipino students at St Patrick's Primary School in Pyramid Hill.

"I was very nervous as I couldn't speak English," 12-year-old Elijah said.

"It was also weird as this town is very small compared to other towns."

Half of the 21 children at the school are Filipino. Senior teacher Colleen Hampson said it had brought enormous benefits to the students.

"There was certainly no multiculturalism in our school before Elijah, so for their sense of community to be broadened, to know that it's welcoming and that it involves so many more nationalities and cultures than just our own," she said.

To acknowledge the contribution of the new townspeople, the local council with the support of Mr Smith are planning the **town's first fiesta**.

"To acknowledge their presence here and involve them in our community and us to share some of their culture as well," Cr McKinnon said.

"The more things that we can interact and get them involved in, the stronger this community will become."

4.3 Senate Education and Employment References Committee Report into Temporary Work Visa Holders, March 2016

54

The pork industry

3.73 The Australian pork industry employs over 20 000 people in Australia and contributes approximately \$2.8 billion in gross domestic product to the Australian economy. The pork industry contributes just over two per cent of total Australian farm production with roughly 1500 pig producers producing around 4.7 million pigs annually.⁶⁰

3.74 Noting that their industry 'has had significant long-standing difficulties attracting and retaining skilled piggery workers', Australian Pork stated that the labour shortages were 'compounded by the perception of the pork industry being a relatively unattractive career choice, exacerbated by the diminishing labour supply in regional Australia'. According to Australian Pork, long term critical shortages existed in recruiting and retaining skilled piggery stock persons.⁶¹

3.75 Ms Deborah Kerr, General Manager of Policy at Australian Pork Limited, noted that the piggeries were predominantly looking for skilled permanent workers rather than seasonal workers, and the industry therefore strongly favoured recruiting workers under the 457 visa program rather than the WHM (417 visa) program.⁶²

3.76 Employees on 417 visas are estimated to comprise 3 to 4 per cent of the pork industry workforce. Australian Pork also indicated there was limited use of labour hire contractors in the pork industry and that there was no knowledge of the extent to which labour hire contractors employed 417 visa holders.⁶³

3.77 Ms Kerr explained that the low use of labour hire firms by the pork industry was due to the nature of the work required on piggeries, namely permanent skilled work:

...pigs farrow a couple of times a year. There is always work on a pig farm. That come-and-go workforce is not particularly suitable. The 457 visa holders are what we use more for the purpose of pig production. It is also to do with the skill requirements. We need people employed in our sheds who can look after the animals—can comply with animal welfare laws, can comply with the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals, which is picked up in many of the states' regulations, and are appropriately trained. And for our 457 visa holders we require the appropriate skill qualification plus three years, or at least five years of experience in our industry overseas, before they will come in. The employer tends to want a different skill set to a 417, so we do not interact very much with a labour hire

60 Australian Pork, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

61 Australian Pork, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

62 Ms Deborah Kerr, General Manager, Policy, Australian Pork Limited, *Committee Hansard*, 19 June 2015, p. 8.

63 Australian Pork, answer to question on notice, 19 June 2015 (received 8 July 2015).

company per se. As I said, they tend to use 457 visas, and they tend to have them directly on the employee.⁶⁴

3.78 The committee was keen to explore why the pork industry experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining a suitably skilled domestic workforce despite the high levels of unemployment and youth unemployment in particular, in rural and regional areas. Ms Kerr attributed the difficulties to the nature of the work (including close interaction with animals), the location of the work, and competition for employment from the resource sector:

I think generally agriculture does tend to have difficulties in rural and regional areas, and I think the two states where it is particularly evident are WA and Queensland, where there have been a lot of what were traditionally agricultural employees going to the mining and coal seam gas sectors. We had this translocation of employment of choice, if you like. That is one area. The other area is that to work on a pig farm you have to like working with animals and in particular like working with pigs. It can be a smelly job, and not a lot of Australian workers particularly want to go and work in pig farms. Those who do tend to really enjoy what they do and love what they do, whether they are Australian workers or are under a 457 visa. To attract workers, our producers go out and advertise, and they do all the things they are required to do under the 457 program to justify getting a 457 visa holder in, but they still have difficulty. They cannot retain the workforce they have.

...

My understanding is that our producers have actually done a lot to advertise and to try to keep workers on. Unfortunately, they are in a situation in which they do have a labour shortage. They are competing with somebody who does cropping, for example, so the employee might be driving a tractor rather than working with pigs. That can stop people. Livestock can be particularly difficult and challenging for some employees. So it is not just within the general workforce; it is also within the agriculture sector. Our pig-producing farms are located in the wheat-sheep zone, and often people do not want to relocate to those areas from, for example, a major metropolitan area. There is the usual gamut of limitations around what our producers do, but they certainly try to source Australian workers who are keen to be in piggeries. They just cannot find the appropriate people.⁶⁵

3.79 The committee also heard from pork producers, Mrs Kerry Murray and Mr Bernard Murray from Murray Free Range near Cobram in Victoria, and Mrs Elizabeth Wallace from Windridge Farms in Young, NSW.

3.80 Mr and Mrs Murray and Mrs Wallace recounted their difficulties in attracting suitable labour. Mrs Wallace noted that in the past year, only six out of 17 Australian

64 Ms Deborah Kerr, General Manager, Policy, Australian Pork Limited, *Committee Hansard*, 19 June 2015, p. 9.

65 Ms Deborah Kerr, General Manager, Policy, Australian Pork Limited, *Committee Hansard*, 19 June 2015, p. 9.

and permanent resident workers had been retained, and of those six, two were Filipino permanent residents that had previously worked in other piggeries, and one was a Filipino permanent resident with no piggery experience. Of those workers that left Windridge Farms, one left because of drug issues, one resigned, and nine simply did not come to work after five days or less.⁶⁶

3.81 The committee was curious to know whether wages and conditions were a factor in Australians not wanting to work on farms. Mr and Mrs Murray and Mrs Wallace confirmed that their businesses pay above award wages. Mrs Wallace stated that their workers are on a 38 hour week and that any work done above 38 hours a week is paid at time and half or double time, with public holidays paid at triple time or time and a half based on the award. She also noted that the company provided additional staff benefits:

We have regular barbecues for our staff on all sites. We have four sites. We regularly provide barbecues, meals, tea and coffee, a lunch room, shower facilities and amenities that would equal anything in a city area. We give the employees an extra 20 minutes a day for their morning break, and that is paid for by the company and not taken out of their time at work.⁶⁷

3.82 Mrs Wallace stated that a manager of five to ten people at their piggery would be on an attractive salary package of \$85 000 to \$90 000 a year plus a house and car. Similarly, Mrs Murray stated that a foreman who had been with them for five years was on a \$100 000 with a three bedroom house, a car, electricity, phone and fuel.⁶⁸

3.83 Mr Murray dismissed the notion that producers might underpay their 457 visa workers by noting that two of their Filipino workers have now bought their own homes. He also claimed that their farm pays their workers more than the engineers and welders at the local engineering plant and yet still cannot attract Australian workers.⁶⁹

3.84 Both sets of farmers agreed that without the workers from the 457 visa program, their businesses simply could not survive.⁷⁰

3.85 Given that piggeries are looking to retain a permanent skilled workforce, Ms Kerr also noted that the pork industry is actively assisting 457 visa holders to gain permanent residency.⁷¹

66 Mrs Elizabeth Wallace, Human Resources, Compliance and Feed Purchasing, Windridge Farms, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 31.

67 Mrs Elizabeth Wallace, Human Resources, Compliance and Feed Purchasing, Windridge Farms, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, pp 29–30.

68 Mrs Elizabeth Wallace, Human Resources, Compliance and Feed Purchasing, Windridge Farms, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 30; Mrs Kerry Murray, Owner, Murray Free Range, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 30.

69 Mr Bernard Murray, Owner, Murray Free Range, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 30.

70 Mrs Elizabeth Wallace, Human Resources, Compliance and Feed Purchasing, Windridge Farms, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 32; Mrs Kerry Murray, Owner, Murray Free Range, *Committee Hansard*, 17 July 2015, p. 32.

3.86 The transition of staff from the 457 visa program to permanent residency was confirmed by Mrs Murray. She stated that the Filipino staff currently employed on their farm were previously 457 visa holders and are all now permanent residents.⁷²

4.4 Senate Education and Employment References Committee Official Hansard, Australia's Temporary Work Visa Programs, 17 July 2015

MURRAY, Mr Bernard, Owner, Murray Free Range

MURRAY, Mrs Kerry, Owner, Murray Free Range

WALLACE, Mrs Elizabeth Mary, Human Resources, Compliance and Feed Purchasing, Windridge Farms

[12:35]

CHAIR: I now welcome Mrs Kerry Murray and Mr Bernard Murray from Murray Free Range, and Mrs Elizabeth Wallace from Windridge Farms. Information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses has been provided to you. The committee has now received a short submission from Murray Free Range, thank you. I now invite you to make short opening remarks. At the conclusion of your remarks, I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you.

Mrs Murray: Thank you, it is great to be here. My husband and I have a large free-range farm, totally free-range from farrow to finish. We employ eight staff. Half of them are Filipinos, half of them are older-aged Aussies. We live about three hours from Melbourne on the Murray River. Our largest nearby town is Cobram with a population of about 5,000. We currently are one of the largest free-range piggeries, selling between 10,000 and 13,000 pigs per year, going into the major supermarkets along the eastern seaboard. My husband and I are at that stage of our lives where we are probably under the pump a bit. We really need to look at succession planning. We have three children but none of them are interested in farming. That has really been a pressure that we have had to endure.

It has always been a real struggle to source good staff to fill those positions. The Filipinos that we currently have all had 457 visas; they are all now permanent citizens. They fit very well into our little community. They have a real affinity with animals. We have never had any problems. They are excellent workers: dedicated, caring, and skilled—which is really difficult to find in rural areas. Like any good business, you are only as good as your employees. We work very hard—and we have worked with both our local TAFE and the DPI, Department of Primary Industry—to ensure ongoing education for all employees. We pay above-award wages. And obviously, because we are at this stage of our lives, the loss of our production would mean the loss of eight jobs locally in the community. The children that are part of the Filipino families attend the local school. The little school is just staying afloat; they are all dependent on the numbers. We have swelled their numbers and increased them in all sorts of capacities—so it has been a really fulfilling process that we have gone through. We have negotiated a labour agreement and currently we are—hopefully—getting two more Filipinos. But it is a real process that we have had to endure. We have been doing that for nearly 10 years. I struggle—I am usually the one inputting and working with the web page, and that has been a nightmare. It really has been very, very difficult.

Currently in Australia—and I think that is probably part of our issue—farming is not seen any more as something that you encourage your children to be part of. They are trying to address that but they have not done a very good job, I am afraid. Because of that, we have done things—even our local engineering works don't pay the equivalent of what we are prepared to pay our workers. It has placed enormous pressures on my husband in particular. Physically, obviously it is quite demanding because we are totally free range. You only need a slight disease or anything to impact, and that has enormous pressures. Because we have such a beautiful product, it is hard to maintain that if something does go wrong.

We have struggled over the years. I am a nurse as my background. With one of our younger employees that we have worked very hard with, we brought in a drug and alcohol worker to work with him to try to maintain him. It just did not work. We had a female just recently; she only lasted six weeks. We have ones that turn up for an interview one day, we give them the position and they do not arrive at work the next day. Basically, I think they are just ticking the box to ensure that they get their unemployment benefits. We recently interviewed a fellow who really was not physically able to cope with that. Even though we could juggle things, there would be OH&S issues around employing someone like that, so we certainly have to stick with our criteria to maintain our integrity.

We have done all sorts of advertising at a national level with national employment bodies, local newspapers and pig-specific journals, and still we have struggled to actually get anyone. Those are probably the nuts and bolts.

Mr Murray: The only thing that I would like to say is I have heard a lot of comment on how overseas workers are exploited. We do not actually see that in the 457 area we are concerned with. Our Filipinos know exactly what their rights are. They will certainly come to us and mention if something has changed, they have heard something in the press or they have read something in the paper. They are really well informed. The only area we are concerned with is the 457 area. I know the Senate committee is probably looking at the whole of

imported workers, but that is our criteria, and we are really battling to get workers. We would hate to see it get any tougher or harder than it is now, because we are really having a lot of difficulty just with the immigration department, trying to get our workers out here to Australia. It almost seems as if they make it harder for us. If we cannot continue to get a good labour force—and we try as hard as we can within Australia, but we cannot get Aussies to work, and we are not the only ones in our area. We are in a very big agricultural area where there are a lot of dairy farmers. They are all the same. They cannot get Aussies to work on the farms. I do not know why it is not seen as a career path, but that is where we want—just the 457 area. There are no hassles in our community as far as the Filipinos fitting in. They have a very big social group in the community. They are not isolated and they feel as if they are actually part of the community.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mrs Wallace, did you wish to make a short opening statement? I know you have tabled your—

Mrs Wallace: That is fine. I will just tell you who I am. I am human resources and compliance and I look after the feed mill for our farm. We have our own in-house feed mill, so I purchase all the grain as well as looking after the personnel. At our farm we have about 4,000 sows. We are an indoor-intensive piggery. The total number of staff, including support staff, is around 38 to 40 actual pig workers and then office staff, maintenance crew and feed mill staff who are considered support to the piggery.

We are only interested in 457, although I do have four people on a 402 visa, which is a training visa from Ukraine. Everything that the Murrays have said—it is a struggle to find people to work in the piggery from the local community. We have advertised nationally. We have advertised in Sydney. We have asked people to come out of the city and come and work with us. We are happy to support them in any way. I also bend over backwards to support local people who come to work with us. We can go into more detail later, but there are some examples I can give of people we have bent over backwards to keep out of jail because they have been good employees and supported in various different ways to, hopefully, retain them as employees. We pay above the award wage. I think people in the city would be surprised, but most piggery workers take home an average of about \$52,000 a year. That is for someone with low literacy and low numeracy skills and no tertiary education. Our managers are on around \$80,000 to \$90,000 a year with vehicles and housing. You are quite happy to employ someone who will work their way up in the piggery, become a manager and expand their ability to earn income for their families.

We only have one 457 currently. They are a Filipino. We do employ six Filipinos who have come through either from other piggeries, got their permanent residency and come to work for us or are friends of the core Filipinos that we have who have been introduced to our industry because they knew someone in the industry and have come to work for us.

I am happy to take questions.

CHAIR: Thank you. Can you tell us where your farm is?

Mrs Wallace: We are in Young.

CHAIR: Okay.

Senator RICE: Did it snow this morning?

Mrs Wallace: No, we have not had snow, but there has been snow all around. It has not gone above seven degrees for a week, but it is beautiful today.

CHAIR: I think it is five here this morning, so you would be well geared up for it. I do not have any questions at this point, so I will go to Senator McKenzie.

Senator McKENZIE: Thank you so much for your evidence. Cobram is a great place. I am a Victorian Senator, so I'm biased! I really appreciate your submission because it goes to address a lot of the evidence that we have heard. Part of my line of questioning will be to put to you what we have had in evidence from other organisations and people to get your reaction. One of the issues that has been raised particularly with the agricultural industries is about the labour shortages. I think it was the NUW and the ACTU that said the reasons there are labour shortages in agricultural are the wages and conditions. Could you respond to that claim?

Mrs Wallace: I will respond to that and I am sure that Kerry will as well. The conditions that our piggery provides are a 38-hour week. Anything above 38 hours is paid at time and a half or double time. On public holidays we have to open our piggery. We have to have people come and work, and they get paid triple time or time and a half based on the award. We have regular barbecues for our staff on all sites. We have four sites. We regularly provide barbecues, meals, tea and coffee, a lunch room, shower facilities and amenities that would equal

anything in a city area. We give the employees an extra 20 minutes a day for their morning break, and that is paid for by the company and not taken out of their time at work.

I have been sitting here for an hour, so I have heard a few comments like 'people's rights are exploited' and 'how do you create a balance between the employee and the employer?' I would like to say that I feel the balance is definitely with the employee and not the employer, because we desperately need people to come to work so that we can meet the various requirements that are placed on us like our QA regulations and the welfare code. We have animal liberationists knocking down our door every so often. We really need to comply with WorkCover. We are our own RTO so that we can train all our staff, so we need to comply with the ASQA regulations. My life is a tangle of compliance, as well as all the other roles I do. We are quite happy for Immigration to put in another audit facility or something like that so that we can show—tick, tick, tick—that everyone has been paid the correct amount of money.

Senator McKENZIE: But I guess the question of the unions was that ag needs to pay people more to get Australians to work in it.

Mrs Wallace: Well, if an Australian came and started on the bottom of the ladder and worked their way up and did their certificate III and attended work—not just came for the job interview but actually came the next day—the world is their oyster. You can earn a lot of money in the pork industry, because we are totally willing to pay—

Senator McKENZIE: What sort of money?

Mrs Wallace: As I outlined before, the average worker would—

Senator McKENZIE: No, but say I have worked my way to middle—

Mrs Wallace: If you become a manager, say of five to 10 people, you would be looking at \$85,000 or \$90,000 a year, plus a house plus a car.

Mrs Murray: And probably the equivalent of that is close to \$100,000. We have two workers at the moment who are totally housed in nice three-bedroom accommodation—cars, housing, electricity, phone, fuel; we have educated them—

Senator McKENZIE: So, a decent salary package—

Mrs Murray: Yes. And our foreman would have had that after five years of working with us. So, in five years he has gone to that level, with that sort of support.

Senator McKENZIE: So the NUW's and ACTU's claims that the wages and conditions being offered by the agricultural industry is the reason Australian workers are not flocking is not the reason.

Mrs Wallace: I think people are not aware of what kind of income they can make in agriculture. I also think there is the disadvantage that it is a smelly environment.

Mrs Murray: Not ours!

Mrs Wallace: It is a bit of a smelly environment, and you do have to get your hands dirty, and it is 6 am starts or 4 am starts when we load out. There are a lot of things that people from the city might think are uncomfortable, but our staff love it, because if they start at 4 am they are gone by 12 o'clock and are home with their families or doing whatever activities they enjoy.

Mr Murray: And we are the same. We are very flexible with our workers. If they want any time off, or to change days or do something else, we are very flexible. We can do whatever they want to do, because we want to keep them happy; we want to keep them on the farm. The other thing is that two of our Filipinos—if you say they are not being paid enough—have now bought their own homes. That does not happen unless you are paying people the proper money or above-award wages, which we are doing. The local engineering place just down the road builds dairies and ships them all around the world. Our workers on our farm are paid more than their welders and engineers down there, but still we cannot seem to get people to come and work on the farm.

Senator McKENZIE: So it is not about wages and conditions.

Mr Murray: It is not about wages. It just seems to be this mental block that at school they are taught, 'You need to be aiming higher' and getting—

Mrs Murray: There is a joke within our industry that it is a form of cruelty now to write your children into your will, to leave the farm to the kids. That is the kind of attitude, I think. They have seen us work very, very hard—we work really hard—so I think there is this mentality now that you would not want to be there. We have probably given our children opportunities, but they have not been keen. The offer of being a white-collar worker is far more appealing.

Mr Murray: But, having said that, farming has been good to us. The reason we are in farming is that we enjoy farming. But I am on the wrong side of 60 now, not the right side of 60.

Senator McKENZIE: And it is across the industry; it is not just the pork industry in agriculture, is it?

Mr Murray: Yes, it is the whole farming sector.

Senator McKENZIE: Another thing that has been put to us, particularly as regional Australians, is quite a simplistic equation around the concerning relationship between the number of temporary visa holders and the number of unemployed Australian workers—again, CFMEU, ACTU, Ged Kearney. Can I get some sense of your reaction to that? I think what evidence we have had before the committee about regional labour markets and particularly the agricultural industry shows that those particular people making those statements do not understand where we live and how we make our living. But perhaps you could give us your perspective on that.

CHAIR: Before you do, I will just clarify the evidence from the CFMEU. It was in relation to a manufacturing engineering plant in a regional location where they had employed a number of 457 workers and then the local worker was made redundant and the 457 workers continued. That is the context in which those comments were made.

Senator McKENZIE: And to add to that, the CFMEU is running an entire campaign at the moment about Aussie jobs and overseas temporary visa holders actually taking Aussie jobs. That is the context I am asking it in.

Mr Murray: I am sure you could pluck examples out of every industry you wanted to and use them as examples and blow it up out of proportion. I am sure it does happen, all over the place, but it is certainly not happening with us. We keep hearing about unemployed Australians. In our area we do not have an unemployment problem; we have an employment problem. You hear that there is six per cent unemployment in Australia. What that really means is that 94 per cent of people are employed. If with everything I did in life I had a 94 per cent success rate I would be doing pretty well. It just means that six per cent of people are unemployed, and of those six per cent of people who are unemployed, a damn lot of them do not want to work. It is a rotten thing to say, but it is true. They do not want to work. And then, of the others, a lot do not want to do the sort of work we have to offer. So, in our area we do not have an unemployment problem; we have an employment problem, and—

Senator McKENZIE: But there is significant youth unemployment in regional areas.

Mr Murray: Yes, but you have to get the youth to want to work. If they do not want to work you cannot drag them out to the farm and say, 'Listen: this is what you've got to do.' That is the situation, the problem we have in the country. You have to have people who want to work, and we do not have them.

Mrs Murray: And we have made lots of attempts. As I said, we have on farm what is a bit like an RTO. I am pretty impressed with that, because even to get good RTOs to come, we have gone regionally to Bendigo—

Mrs Wallace: That is why we are an RTO.

Mrs Murray: We have people from the Department of Primary Industries and through a Bendigo TAFE. It is a good two hours away. They come on farm once a month for a full day to run training for our Aussie and our Filipino staff, and it has been fantastic. So it is not that we are not prepared to train young people and give them a smoko room or whatever. But they have to get out, and yes, it rains. Sorry, but we are an outdoor, free-range piggery; they might get wet. But we have raincoats and gumboots. The situation is that each of the sows has their own special little hut that they probably have to crawl into. It might not tick all the boxes. I am afraid that there is a little bit of getting your hands dirty, and I do not know whether the Aussie youths today really want to do that.

Mr Murray: With the last employment situation, Kerry put out all these flyers around all the agricultural colleges around—

Mrs Murray: And universities.

Mr Murray: We did all that sort of stuff as well, and it was still no good.

Mrs Wallace: I have some specifics. Out of the last 17 people I have employed, over the last 18 months, one young fellow was bringing drugs to work and was caught with drugs, so we had to part company. Another young girl resigned. Nine just did not come back to work within a five-day period—no phone call, nothing; they just did not come back to work. And of the six who stayed, two were Filipinos whom we hired from another piggery, and they came to us for personal reasons, and another one was a Filipino friend of theirs who was a young fellow, a permanent resident. I think he has come in on a different visa, a family visa. He is going wonderfully well. And we have three Australians who have managed to last longer than four or five months and who I think have a chance of making it in the industry and moving forward with a career.

It buoys my heart occasionally when I get someone who is young and an Australian and they say: 'This is the best job I've ever had. I really enjoy this. It's so busy, and there are a variety of things to do' and so on. I think, 'Thank God.' I have managed to employ three Australians out of 17 over a period of 18 months. If we did not have the route for immigrants, the 457 visa, there would be some very tired people at our workplace, because the people who are employed there would have to do a lot more hours to get around all the jobs. As for management, would not be leaving any time before 9 pm, because the pigs have to be fed and watered and vaccinated and looked after.

Mrs Murray: We would not survive, basically, without 457s.

Mrs Wallace: No.

Senator McKENZIE: So, your experience of the temporary work visa programs has been incredibly positive.

Mrs Murray: Except for the website!

Senator McKENZIE: Again, you nodded, and Mrs Wallace, you sighed, clasping your hands.

Mrs Wallace: It has been wonderful. It is really fantastic. Even though there are a lot of hoops to jump through and you have to have your sponsorship in place, either with your labour agreement or your 457 sponsorship, and every time Immigration changes their website—which happened yesterday, when I logged on—and you have to learn how to navigate around it again, and there is the fact that you cannot cut and paste a document into the website, which means that for every visa you have to type it all in again—

Senator McKENZIE: Aside from those issues—

Mrs Wallace: It is wonderful. We just would not survive otherwise. And our Australian employees are grateful for the assistance and help and the qualities that the people from, say, Ukraine bring. We have people from Eastern Europe as well as the Philippines. They cannot say enough good things about them, because they take the load. Any Australian who is still working in our piggery has been taking the load. If we have somebody who comes for three days and then does not show up, the others wear the load, so they are thrilled to have them, because they are energetic; they come with a purpose to earn money and better themselves.

Senator McKENZIE: What do you say to people who throughout this inquiry, and I guess in this broader public debate, might say that a significant proportion of the agricultural industry's farmers and producers are actually in cahoots and wanting to exploit foreign workers?

Mr Murray: We do not see it, so I cannot accept that. We can only deal with what we see and what we do.

Senator McKENZIE: Yes, so what do you say to that?

Mr Murray: Well, a load of rubbish.

Senator McKENZIE: A load of rubbish.

Mr Murray: Yes.

Senator McKENZIE: Mrs Wallace?

Mrs Wallace: I would say that we have invested a lot into all of our employees who stay for longer than three or four months. It costs a lot more to hire someone from the Philippines or Ukraine than it costs to hire someone who is living in town in Young, 12 kilometres away. It is a lot of my time. It is ludicrous to say that agriculture is exploiting anyone. We have backpackers, because Young is the cherry capital in New South Wales, so we have a lot of—

Senator McKENZIE: We should have Senator Nash tell you the story—

Mrs Wallace: and wine growers and grape growers, and fruit picking is another summertime and springtime occupation. So I have a lot of backpackers that come and knock on my door as well, looking for some casual work for a period of a month or a few weeks. We do occasionally offer probably backpacker-type employment every year, and they know their rights. I would be astounded that they would accept anything below the award. With regard to 457s being exploited, that is impossible because they have to sign their contract with you and in that contract is what you are going to pay them and their position description in order to apply for the nomination part of the application to Immigration. They have copies of that, and their signature has to be on it or Immigration will not accept it. So I find it would be pretty much impossible to exploit anyone.

Senator McKENZIE: We have heard otherwise, but anyway I cede.

CHAIR: I have just a couple of comments. I think it is very hard for us, and particularly for people such as yourselves who do the right thing and bend over backwards—as good employers do across the nation—to look after your staff, to imagine it, but we have certainly seen firsthand evidence of visa workers, particularly 457

workers, being ripped off. You can falsify documents—all the stuff which is alien to you as employers and to us as senators. There is a percentage in the Australian employment area who see an opportunity and take it.

Mrs Wallace: I watch *Four Corners* all the time. That was a terrible incident, but I think it is isolated, and I would hate to feel that we would lose our ability to bring people in on various visas because of a minority. We are quite happy to open our books, our payroll, to you or to Immigration on a yearly basis to do a quick audit. Maybe other people need to do that.

CHAIR: Nobody on the committee is suggesting that visa workers are not a part of the Australian workforce. In fact, no-one who has submitted is saying that. But what we do need to do is find solutions. It is not just the *Four Corners* program; the committee has heard firsthand evidence from workforce and we have now had the Fair Work Ombudsman's report. My frustration is: why haven't Coles and Woolworths acted—as I am sure they would be on your backs if things were not up to standard—when the proof is there?

Mrs Wallace: The other thing is that the various government organisations that I comply with are WorkCover and ASQA and the EPA and our QA body et cetera and they require every year that you do a certain amount of reporting. If that was required, then we would happily do that. I am sick of paperwork, but I would take it on because it is important to our business. Perhaps labour hire companies may need to do that, and all employers, if that is the case, if people are being exploited, but they definitely are not on my watch.

CHAIR: No, and I think what is becoming clear to the committee is that there are particular segments of the Australian labour market which are more easily exploited than others. We had the wine growers in the other day and they are working with the council because their experience is the same as yours: they do not think it is an attractive career for young people, so they are doing this whole marketing exercise. But there has been no exploitation charges there.

Mr Murray: Isn't it a pity though that here in the Australian society laws tend to be made for the lowest common denominator to cover the people that do the wrong thing and not really to help the majority of the people that do the right thing.

CHAIR: If we had those laws in place we would not have a problem. There is a serious problem from some parts of the Australian labour market that I do not think we have found a solution to, but they are clearly there. I will hand over to Senator Rice.

Senator RICE: Thank you very much for your evidence, because it is really good and heartening to hear from employers who are obviously trying to do the best for their workers. Sadly, we have heard enough evidence over the last month of companies that are not. The question that we have been grappling with is: how much is it people who are just the odd bad eggs who aren't complying and how much is it systemic?

I think there are very different issues with the 457 visas compared with the 417s for the working holiday-makers, which I think have got much less regulation over them and are much more prone to being exploited. Have either of you used much of the working holiday-maker visas at all?

Mr Murray: We have not used any of them. We just use 457 people. We are really happy with them because they know they have got a career course in front of them and that is what we want. We want permanent workers. We want people to stay. If they are not happy, they are not going to stay.

Mrs Wallace: We probably hire two a year and they do grounds work in springtime, clean up around our trees to make our grounds look nice, do a bit of mowing. It has been dry so from November for the last few years we have had them watering small trees and doing that kind of outdoors labour. Last year I think I had two French boys walk in about three weeks prior to Christmas wanting work. Whoever walked through the door was going to get a job because we were short staffed in one of our units, very short staffed, so I hired them on the spot. They spent three or four weeks working in the piggery. They told me when they were leaving, by the way this week is our last week. I did not tell them I was astounded. I would love to be in a position of power with regard to employees. They tend to tell us what is happening. Yes, we do hire maybe two German or French backpackers to do a little bit of work. They know their rights. They come in, they know what they should be paid and we pay them the right amount.

Senator RICE: It is very different to the examples you would have seen on the *Four Corners* program?

Mrs Wallace: Yes, that was surprising.

Mr Murray: I will give you an example which has happened in the last couple of months. One of our Filipino's father died so he had to go back to the Philippines and then he had his holidays booked for a week after he came back right on top of one of our other Filipinos going on holidays. So I had no other staff to cover. I had two days off in three months. I worked seven days a week, 10 to 12 hours every day because we just could not get

staff. That is what happens—it falls back to all the other workers. So I was trying to relieve the pressure on other workers by taking up the slack myself but it takes a toll. I cannot keep doing that sort of thing.

Senator RICE: The issue that tends to be a potential problem is the use of labour hire companies. It sounds like both of you employ your staff directly rather than using a labour hire organisation. Have you considered using labour hire organisations?

Mrs Murray: We tried. We have advertised and gone through them. You do not even get a conversation back. I think the last time we did that, we got one fellow that was known to us that had a reputation and we would not have even entertained him, I am sorry. The pig industry is a very small industry, so you have to realise too that if anybody in the pig industry was doing the wrong thing, we would hear about it. We would like to think that we would hear along the grapevine they have not been doing the right thing. I have never heard of it, not in our industry anyway.

Mrs Wallace: There is a saying that I probably cannot repeat here. I have exploited every possible thing I can imagine to attract more people to work at our farm. It is funny that you mention it because our processor person who buys all of our animals also has a processing plant in Young. He has given me the number of his labour hire company this week. But I am not looking for people that are going to come for a few months. We need to train them and retain them because when you lose a significant person from your farm, it does impact across that particular section, unit or even the whole farm because they take knowledge away with them. I would definitely look at any option but have not been successful with labour hire companies or even the government employment agencies like Mission Australia. They are not terribly successful. I do not think I have had anyone that has ever stayed in our employment that has come through an employment agency.

Mrs Murray: We have. As I said, we either have Filipino staff or older Aussies. Two older Aussies fit the criteria, so there was extra money attached through one of the government incentives.

Mr Murray: They were long-term unemployed and in the age range.

CHAIR: Ms Murray, you said you are doing a second labour hire agreement. So how does that work? Every time you want to employ new people, do you have to enter into a new agreement?

Mrs Murray: Our labour agreement is only recent as in we set it up two years ago. That took quite a lot of doing because we were one of the first to look at doing a labour agreement. Because we were struggling in every other way, we thought that was a way we could progress. So we did that and have had that in place now. We have not been able to get anyone in because there have been government issues and all sorts of issues. So finally we have got two hanging in there but it is such a process.

CHAIR: But if you wanted to bring, say, another two workers in, would you then have to get another labour agreement?

Mrs Wallace: There is a limit to how many you can bring in.

CHAIR: Sorry, I thought you said you had a labour agreement and then you had to do another one?

Mr Murray: No.

CHAIR: So you have done your first one?

Mr Murray: We have just done one and I think we are allowed to bring in five.

Mrs Murray: We can bring in six.

Mr Murray: The problem we had was that if they failed their international English language test and you have got an agreement set up, then you have to start up the process again and it waits and it waits. The immigration department does not want to give you any help. If you ring up and ask a question such as: this fellow has only just failed his English lesson by this much, will he be okay? The department says it cannot tell you that answer unless you put in an application for a visa for him. Well, that is just going down a path where you could fail.

CHAIR: You are having a bet, aren't you?

Mr Murray: It is ridiculous.

Mrs Wallace: It is just 'throw it in there and just hope for the best' in some cases.

CHAIR: We have got Immigration this afternoon; we can ask them then.

Mrs Wallace: We have a fantastic industry body, Australian Pork Limited, that looks after us. It has put something in place with Immigration but I did mine prior to that format being in place. It was exhaustive. It was three months of every time I had a spare moment working on it. Anyway, that was fine but then in my first year I only attracted one person. It was open for three positions for the first year but I only found one person to fill the

position so then I have had to redo probably a good third of that to make it relevant. I have now finished that. Yes, there is a fair bit of work involved.

Mr Murray: The other upsetting thing that happens to us, and we spoke to the immigration department about this, is we can never speak to the same person twice. It does not happen. You will speak to three or four different people and get three or four totally different answers.

CHAIR: I am sure that is the case.

Mr Murray: And it just drives you mad.

Mrs Wallace: The other thing is they will ask you a question. I have an application in place at the moment and one lady rang and asked me a question. I answered it. I had made a mistake on the application so I had to reapply. It costs money to reapply again. So I reapplied and she said, 'As soon as you reapply, just give me a call, give me the TRN number—the application number—and I will approve the nomination for you.' This person needed a bridging visa. When I rang the number back, it just rang out. For a week I rang it every day, a couple of times a day and it just rang out so she just disappeared off the face of the earth. It is difficult.

Mrs Murray: To add to your drama, I did exactly the same thing but because I have so many different numbers going on at any different time—there are TRN numbers, this number, that number—I put the wrong number in. So my nomination was then rejected and that was \$350 out the door. I had to resubmit another one. And then I was actually told that, no, I would not get that money back. Luckily, through the support of our wonderful APL, we managed to fight our way through that. But it was such a nightmare. Nothing is simple.

Mrs Wallace: You are doing everything. You are busy with everything else and are trying to run a business.

CHAIR: You are trying to run a business. We will ask Immigration about those. I appreciate that time away from the farm today for you busy people. Thank you very much for coming today.

Mrs Wallace: Can I just add one more point?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs Wallace: When John Howard was in power and he was trying to collect up and embrace people coming in, I was working for a different piggery at the time and I brought in about six Filipinos for that piggery. There were business liaison officers with Immigration and they used to actually come out and do group meetings, and industries that were interested could go along to a talk. They would give you their card and they would be there as a kind of a support person for any questions that you had. They would get in and debug applications and assist in that way. Those officers do not seem to be available anymore. That was probably six years ago.

CHAIR: We can raise that with them. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 13:21 to 14:30

4.5 Letter of Support from RSPCA



1 December 2017

Mr Andrew Spencer
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Pork Ltd

Dear Andrew

RSPCA Australia is of the view that staff with appropriate training and husbandry skills are critical to ensure the health and welfare of pigs on farm. Under state government regulations, all stockpersons working with pigs are required to be competent to maintain the health and welfare of the animals in their care, or under the direct supervision of a competent stockperson. However, we recognise the pork industry has had significant and long-standing difficulties attracting and retaining skilled piggery workers. For this reason, RSPCA supported industry's efforts to secure access to skilled workers from overseas through the Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement in 2014.

Changes to the temporary skilled migration program announced in April 2017 have raised concerns about industry's ability to sustain its skilled workforce. RSPCA supports the efforts of the Australian pork industry to restore the pathway to permanency for temporary skilled migrants with appropriate husbandry and animal welfare training. Improving and maintaining a high level of competency and awareness amongst stockpersons over the long term will lead to better welfare outcomes for Australia's pigs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Heather Neil'.

Heather Neil
Chief Executive Officer

RSPCA Australia

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