

My husband and I have a cherry orchard in southern Tasmania employing between 40 - 50 people of which 95% are backpackers. Following the budget announcement last year that the 'Backpacker Tax' was to be implemented from July 1, 2016, I wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP and also with Tasmanian politicians who said they spoke with Treasury staff and could not find any reason not to implement this tax but said they would be happy to talk with us if we could give them reasons to fight against the tax.

I spoke with the backpackers who came ready to harvest our cherries in January and most were on their first year work visa and said that if they had known of the tax before they left their respective countries they would not have come to Australia, especially Tasmania where we have to single pick cherries for export, they would have gone to New Zealand where their tax is 20% which they can claim back before leaving and they are also covered by basic medical care.

I then spoke with Mr Eric Hutchinson (who at that time was a Federal Minister of Parliament) who came out to speak with our pickers but did not offer them any hope of having the tax changed - I honestly believe Mr Hutchinson and most other politicians do not understand the effect the implementation of this tax will have on agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture or tourism in regional Australia.

Following the Federal Budget the Treasurer was quoted in 'The Mercury' newspaper that if foreigners working in Australia on Working Holiday visas paid 32.5% tax it will save the budget \$540 million over the next four years - the monies these people would spend within regional Australia over the same period would 'save' several regional areas, as most overseas workers spend their money within the community they are living and working within.

Each year we have advertised the positions available we have only ever received up to five applications from Australians (when we can we give positions to students once they have turned fifteen) but most young people leave districts like ours to find fulltime work in other areas. We have found that Australians will not do the jobs that the Working Holiday Visa holders will do unless they are paid by the hour (which we did for the first two years) but as we discovered they were always off at the end of the orchard having a cigarette or it was coffee time, trying to ensure that they only had a morning tea, lunch and if still working afternoon tea break was impossible they would pick a lug (8 kg in our case) then it was break time, so at the end of the day we had fruit that needed to be picked but because they were only picking 2 or 4 lugs each a day we lost a lot of fruit that was unable to be sold.

Australia expects good working conditions as they have every right to but the work ethic of a lot of Australians leaves a lot to be desired - we are a country of working people who most want to start at the top instead of working their way up the ladder, we are a country who at the moment need to face adversity to toughen us up and be proud of what we do for our country.

Most Australian fruit and vegetable farmers will not be able to survive if the backpackers decide not to come to Australia, most employers do the right thing and look after their workers we have random visits from Immigration and Workplace Standards to make sure we are paying the correct amount and that the living conditions are reasonable.

On the ABC news on Sunday night (6/3) an orchard grower was interviewed along with some of his pickers who said that it would be 1 bin for the picker, 1 bin for the ATO and 1 bin for the farmer to pay all the levies, spray costs, hire of bees for fertilisation etc.

### **How can we reverse this tax?**

This review needs to be finalised as soon as possible as the picking season for most farmers has or is about to start and the young people need to organise passports etc for the trip to Australia.