



Working holiday maker visa review
Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

DATE: 1 SEP 2016

Dear Minister,

Review of the Working Holiday Visa Programme

We are submitting a request that the recent changes for voluntary workers in relation to the Working Holiday Visa Program be reversed or revised so that voluntary work can be contribute towards a second visa.

My family has had a farm in southern New South Wales for approximately 50 years. We have been hosting Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOFers) for approximately three years. Under this program, people (usually from overseas) provide labour in exchange for food, accommodation, and being shown the local area. In our case, we hosted 15 WWOOFers in 2014, most were not seeking a second year extension visa, but many were.

Since the changes were introduced in 2015, we have not hosted any WWOOFers because we have had no requests. From discussions, it appears that the change in visa regulations has contributed to a significant decline in the number of WWOOFer coming to Australia. This has been compounded by the discussions surrounding the introduction of the backpacker tax. As a result, there are fewer WWOOF (whether seeking a second year extension visa or not) to work in rural areas.

Efforts to find people locally to employ for short term (in our case, at most two weeks at a time) work have also not proven successful. This makes ongoing management of the farm more difficult. It certainly places additional work pressure on each member of our family (ranging from 52 to 87).

I would note that from a WWOOFers perspective, the approach of working for accommodation, meals and hospitality is more financially rewarding than if they worked for wages. Local short term accommodation ranges upwards from \$80/night (40 km away). Accommodation nearby is all over \$100/night. As shown in the table below (excluding tax), even using the wage for an over 21 year old, and the cheapest available accommodation, minimal costs for food, and transport to work (which is not available as we don't have public transport), the WWOOFer would basically break even.

Item	Units	Unit rate	Subtotal	Total
Labour	37.5 hr	\$ 21.61 /hr	\$ 810.38	\$ 810.38
Accommodation	7 days	\$ 80.00 /day	\$ 560.00	
Meals	7 days	\$ 20.00 /day	\$ 140.00	
Transport to work (which is not available)	5 days	\$ 15.00 /day	\$ 75.00	\$ 775.00
				<u>\$ 35.38</u>

Kurrajong Hill

If they were able to find accommodation more cheaply (which we haven't been able to identify), they may end up being slightly ahead. However, in addition to this, we take WWOOFer to the local tourist sites and events. We provide transport and pay entry.

From our perspective, if we paid the WWOOFer rather than the current exchange, there would be significant additional administrative costs.

However, this is the small part of the consideration. Both the WWOOFer and WWOOFer host, gain from the relationship by learning about each other's country and making personal contacts. In our case, we have had WWOOFers from over 10 countries, including China. Each WWOOFer lives in our home, shares meals with us, and we take them to the local sites and events. These WWOOFers have had the opportunity to get to know Australian families and learn about Australia in a way a tourist can not do, and as a result, they develop a very positive image of, and attitude towards, Australia and Australians.

Many of these WWOOFers are young professionals, between University and employment. Where their career will take them is unknown. However, some are certain to be future business leaders. Surely developing such strong relationships is a benefit for Australia in the long term, particularly in countries such as China which are growing trade partners.

In some cases, the experience of the WWOOFer leads to their parents and friends coming to Australia as tourists. The money that they spend here also contributes to our national economy.

In addition, on a global level, we live in a time where uncertainty and disharmony is growing. Greater mutual understanding and stronger the bonds between people of different nations, must also contribute to reducing disharmony and improving stability.

These WWOOFers also play an important part in the regional economy. There is a shortage of people willing to undertake unskilled farm work so finding local workers is difficult, particularly where it is not permanent. Each of the WWOOFers also spends money in the area when they visit the local sites and often purchase local items as souvenirs and gifts. This is important for a rural community.

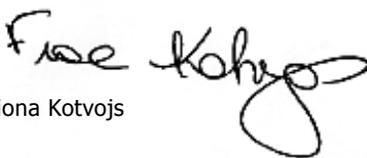
While, financially we and the WWOOFer could achieve the same result by paying WWOOFers as per the award and then the WWOOFer paying for accommodation and meals, this would not achieve the same outcome. The relationship established is quite different where there is an expectation of mutual exchange rather than one of payment.

Each of our WWOOFer has been happy with the relationship. Several have deliberately chosen to be a WWOOF rather than work as a farm worker under a 'paid' relationship. Their previous experience as paid workers found them to be earning less than the cost of accommodation, food and transport and/or not in as friendly a situation.

We would therefore strongly encourage you to reconsider removal of voluntary work from being able to contribute towards second visa.

Please email or telephone if we can provide further information.

Yours sincerely



Fiona Kotvojs