

I have written 3 submissions (all copies sent to The Wwoofer Organization and relevant Ministers) regarding my full evaluation of the mess the Government, through its ignorance and stupidity is getting the rural sector into. Plainly the Government is either not listening or not interested.

Our future submissions need to be more aggressive and will require media support.

Our farm has been affected dramatically by the change to the wwoofer second year visa. This year for the first time in many years, we have been unable to attract wwoofer or volunteer workers to our mango season. To keep our customer base, we engaged backpackers, but our profit margin plummeted. This may mean the end of our mango processing business.

The Government needs to face facts or the rural sector will begin to collapse, leading to nonviable small farming and therefore small rural towns will suffer accordingly.

The facts are:

Young Australians will not work on farms (the dole is too attractive);

The entire agricultural sector relies heavily on backpacker labour;

Small organic farms need wwoofers to survive;

Manufacturing and IT Companies are all going offshore or have already gone;

Ford/Holden are leaving Australia and Australia Post is struggling to survive;

Some operators have been caught cheating on labour;

Shops, restaurants, cafes etc are reluctant to open on weekends;

The main reasons for the above is the cost of labour;

Farms cannot be moved offshore so it will be survive or close, leaving many no alternative but to join the growing dole queue;

Letters I wrote to the relevant Minister have been largely ignored choosing instead to reply through standard bureaucratic form letters;

The Government has not engaged in any widespread consultation;

Flow on effects of losing overseas farm workers will impact greatly on the backpacker industry and Tourism Australia;

All Australian farms do not have tariff protection so at the very least, in order to remain viable and competitive, they will require subsidies, especially labour, electricity and water;

Domination by [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] prevents farmers from receiving realistic prices and also to food wastage, due to unrealistic sizing and sorting as is required by these dominant Companies;

General feedback from wwoofers and volunteer workers is that they feel greatly unappreciated by not qualifying for their second year visa;

General feedback from backpackers is that they will not work in Australia if the hefty tax increase is introduced by the Government.

Specific feedback from workers is that many farmers are cheating them with wages and forced accommodation on their farms in order to obtain work. These aspects have been widely covered by the media.

The reason given by the Government of “strengthening the integrity of the Holiday/Working Visa” does not stack up, and the Government is refusing to expand on this lame bureaucratic tripe.

Workers complain that the Tax and Superannuation is a waste of time, as the tax is recoverable and almost the entire superannuation is absorbed by rip off Superannuation Firms in Administration costs.

This paperwork is an unnecessary administrative burden on farmers and employers.

Where the Government can help is as follows:

Immediately revert to the original qualifying second year visa standards.

Totally scrap the tax and superannuation for overseas workers.

Instal a tiered pay schedule covering overseas workers and Australian workers.

Establish a Government feedback organization to allow abused or cheated overseas workers to make genuine complaints direct, without fear of reprisal.

Penalties need to apply to errant employers/farmers.

Instruct major supermarket giants to pay reasonable rates to farmers/producers for their produce.

Scrap the \$1.00 a litre for milk immediately.

Offer subsidies to farmers on electricity, water and labour.

Encourage backpackers to come to Australia with these new incentives.

Encourage farmers to stay on their farms with these incentives.

Phase out non-brand packaging to allow Australian producers to display their brands and compete accordingly.

Introduce clear labelling for Australian owned, with Australian products and ingredients and sufficient shelf space must be provided for them.

Regulate to ensure supermarket giants pay producers within 30 days of dispatch. Farmers should be paid within 14 days to accommodate their high overhead costs particularly labour. Failure to pay should incur penalty rates.

All Australian fresh products should be suitably displayed and signed as such.

Priority of Australian grown, processed and manufactured goods should be acquired and sold before sourcing overseas goods.

Government controlled media outlets should be tasked with promoting Australian products.

## Compensation

The Government has to be held accountable for the effect their poor decision making has on farmers and as such should be preparing compensation packages for those affected.

The rural industry does not require a lengthy inquiry or study into these matters as the facts have already been made known to them. We require strong and effective decision making now.

The National Farmers Federation should be scrapped due to its ineffectiveness and regional based voluntary committees need to provide immediate and relevant information direct to the Australian Government.

Stan Thornton  
Papa Juan's Organic Farm  
PO Box 1783  
Mareeba Qld 4880  
Ph/Fax 0740933110  
1 September 2016