

Submitter information

Please provide your name and phone number, and preferred email address for contact if it is different from the one used to send this form:

§ 9(2)(g)(i) Business Support Manager, Enterprise North Canterbury

9(2)(a)

In what capacity are you providing feedback?
e.g. on behalf of: your company, the company you work for, an industry organisation, a union, a licensed immigration adviser etc.

We are the local economic development agency submitting in support of businesses and the Hurunui Council.

We are submitting on this matter as it is relevant to the development of the region and as a respected advocate for the business sector of the regional economy.

A number of businesses (and one primary school) in the Hurunui area have indicated that they will be providing feedback.

If you are representing a company or group, what is the name of that group?

Enterprise North Canterbury

What industry or industries does that group work in?

All industries, but specifically dairy, tourism, wine and manufacturing.

In your company or industry, what are the most common occupations for migrant workers?

Skilled workers in dairy, other farming and wine

Skilled and semi-skilled workers in manufacturing.

Unskilled and semi-skilled workers in tourism, retail and wine.

What visa categories are commonly used by those workers?

I.e. resident visa, Essential Skills work visa, Work-to-Residence work visa (under the Talent or Long Term Skill Shortage List categories), Post-Study work visa (open or employer assisted), open work visa.

Resident Visa, Essential Skills Work Visa, Work to Residence Work Visa

Only answer the following questions if you directly employ migrant workers:

How many migrant workers do you currently employ? (Refer to the visa categories in the question above)

n/a

Have you supported an Essential Skills visa application for any of these workers?

n/a

Using wage or salary information to help determine skill level and access to Essential Skills migrants

Proposal 1: Introduction of remuneration thresholds to determine skill levels and associated visa conditions for Essential Skills visas

Consider the proposal of aligning the remuneration thresholds for the Essential Skills visa with the remuneration thresholds for the Skilled Migrant Category.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from defining lower-, mid- and higher-skilled Essential Skills migrants in this way?

Give details of the occupations or sectors and wage or salary levels you are thinking of.

We see no issues with this proposal. Ensuring that employers are paying a reasonable rate for the jobs on offer will help to reduce exploitation but will also make it less likely that employers will employ migrants where New Zealand staff are available.

Reinforcing the temporary nature of the Essential Skills visa and managing the settlement expectations of temporary migrants

Proposal 2a: Introduction of a maximum duration for lower-skilled Essential Skills migrants

Consider the option of a three years for a maximum duration for lower-skilled Essential Skills visas.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from the proposed maximum duration for lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders?

Give details of the occupations and industries you are thinking of.

We have concerns about this proposal, both from a business and a community perspective. This is particularly in the smaller rural areas with a high level of migrant staff in the dairy sector. This will have a large impact in the isolated Amuri area. One dairy farm owner ENC spoke to, 9(2)(a) said "they do not appear to have thought through the impact of these proposals on rural communities".

From a business perspective this will have a negative impact. Quite simply, there are no workers available in this area who are employable in the industries that make use of migrant

workers. The unemployment rate in the Hurunui is 1.9% and there are fewer than 20 beneficiaries in the district who are available and able to work. Put bluntly, none of them have been found to be employable (for various reasons). Businesses have been putting a high level of investment and effort in increasing productivity, but even at a high level of productivity there is still a severe shortage of worker availability. 9(2)(a)

has often stated that the one thing slowing his business growth is the difficulty in finding workers.

This proposal would lead to a high number of workers being replaced every three years with other migrant workers who will then need to be trained up on the systems and processes of each business. It will also increase Health and Safety risks in businesses as new workers are brought up to speed on safe practices.

This is inefficient for the business owners and disruptive for all staff. It will increase the cost and complication of doing business in rural areas which does not fit with the government goal of growing the regional economies.

From a community perspective this will be disastrous. Small rural townships (such as the town of Culverden) have suffered from reducing local population for many years. The number of migrants in the area have mitigated this loss, holding the overall population at a steady level. Many community facilities are reliant on migrants for their survival.

Migrants who have integrated into their local community fill the sports clubs, the churches and the schools and provide a diversity that improve the wellbeing of the community. Migrant families are an essential component in the survival of rural areas that face diminishing populations and difficulty retaining young people

In setting a maximum duration, it will create a 'churn' of migrants meaning a lack of continuity for community facilities and services. This will mean fewer migrants are able to get involved in governance, coaching or other essential community services. A lack of continuity means that it will be harder for the migrant community to have 'a voice' in matters that pertain to them and the wider community. It will also reduce the prospect of whole families coming to New Zealand together. This will have an adverse impact on our small communities in a social sense and worker wellbeing that comes from having a family.

In short, rural areas in the Hurunui welcome migrant families with open arms and recognise their contribution to business success and to community cohesion. We believe that this proposal, if enacted, would be damaging to both business and community.

Proposal 2b: Introduction of stand down period for lower-skilled Essential Skills migrants

Consider the option for a year-long stand down period following the maximum duration for lower-skilled Essential Skills visas.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from these proposed changes?

Give details of the occupations and industries you are thinking of.

We consider the impact of this proposal to be similar to that of part 2a, above.

A year long stand-down would result in an ongoing 'churn' in migrant workers which would be expensive and disruptive for businesses and workers, and detrimental to rural communities.

Proposal 3: Require the partners of lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to meet the requirements for a visa in their own right

Consider the proposal to require the partners of lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to meet the requirements for a visa in their own right.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from these proposed changes?

Give details of the occupations and industries you are thinking of.

We have concerns about this proposal for two reasons:

It impacts the ability of visa holders to bring their families with them. As well as being a disincentive for workers to come to New Zealand it would increase the number of single workers in rural areas. Migrant families are an essential component of small rural areas (for the reasons outlined in part 2a) and single workers are far less likely to become involved in the local community.

There may also be implications for migrant families if visas are approved at different times.

The proposal will impact on the tourism and retail sectors who rely on partners of migrant workers to fill part-time and full-time low skilled positions. These are positions that would be unlikely to find visa-eligible workers under their own right, but who are able to work as partners of the main visa-holder. As above, these businesses are unlikely to be able to find other workers due to the extremely low unemployment rate in the area (1.9%) and they would be unlikely to attract workers from overseas specifically for this work due to the seasonal, casual and low paid nature of the work.

Additionally, having partners of main visa holders working in the community reduces their isolation which increases their motivation and opportunity to become involved in the local community. Studies by MSD have shown that partners that are not involved in the community become isolated and are at higher risk of mental health issues. This impacts on the main visa holder and has been responsible for absenteeism and resignations.

Isolation of newcomers into rural areas is a serious issue and in 2015 Enterprise North Canterbury established a 'Community Connector' role to help newcomers connect into rural communities. This was as a result of feedback from business owners showing that isolation was leading to high staff turnover which was negatively impacting business.

Proposal 4: Require the children of lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to meet the requirements for a visa in their own right

Consider the proposal to require the children of lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to meet the requirements for a visa in their own right.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from these proposed changes?

Give details of the occupations and industries you are thinking of.

We have concerns about this proposal as we feel it would impact heavily on the ability of family groups to work in New Zealand. If children need to meet the requirements for a visa in their own right, that will impact on the ability for employers to bring over stable family groups and will also impact on the make-up of the community. It would be very likely to cause the closure of some community based sports clubs and community activities and would reduce the numbers of children attending rural schools.

While this would have a negative impact on employers in terms of staff wellbeing, we feel that the larger impact would be on the fabric of the community in smaller rural townships.

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Reinforce that Essential Skills visas should only be granted for the period for which the employment is offered

Proposal 5: Make it explicit how the 'period of employment' condition applies to seasonal work

Consider the option to reinforce that Essential Skills visas for seasonal work are only for the length of the season and that the offer of employment must match the length of the season.

What impacts or implications do you foresee from these options?

Give details of the occupations or sectors you think are likely to be affected.

The proposal given appears fair and well balanced as long as the process involved in applying for discretion is straightforward, well communicated and consistent.

Consider the list of seasonal occupations being considered.

Are there any seasonal occupations that should be added or removed from this list? Why?

We consider that 'adventure tourism workers' should be changed to 'tourism workers'. Other tourism operators have the same pressures regarding seasonality as adventure tourism and we see no reason they should be excluded

Farming can have seasonal highs and lows, but should not be restricted into this category. Some farm workers are required all year round for farms to be able to function.

Consider the list of seasonal occupations being considered.

If you employ seasonal staff, or represent a sector with seasonal staff:

- What are the occupations of the seasonal staff within the sector that you are commenting on?
- For each of the occupations that you have identified, what is the typical period that you require seasonal staff to cover (e.g the peak of the season)?