Seasonal Worker Programme NT Pilot Project Evaluation and Lessons Learnt Report

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About the Author
Aisla Connolly, is a qualified human resource professional and a member of the Australian Human Resources Institute. During the pilot project Aisla gained practical experience which was supplemented with the qualification of a Certificate in Engagement through the International Association for Public Participation, Australasia.

As a rural local for over thirty years, Aisla has a good understanding of current issues affecting regional areas of the Northern Territory and is experienced with government processes.

“As my Husband is a business Owner/Operator I understand the many and various requirements placed on small business. Hence, my aim is to make this process a simple one, where the outcome is beneficial for your business.”

Acknowledgements
From the horticulture industry perspective, the project has been not only useful but successful and it should be measured not just from a Government perspective but from an industry perspective. NT Farmers Association have, based off the Workforce Planning Coordinators report developed some recommendations which have formed a strong position on the labour issues, as such we are grateful to the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation for the funding to undertake this Pilot Project.

The team at Migration Northern Territory, Department of Trade, Business and Innovation, Darwin, NT Government.

Northern Territory (NT) Farmers Association Board, Staff and Members.

Australian Hotels Association of the Northern Territory (AHANT) Board, Staff and Members.

The Department of Employment, Seasonal Worker Program Team, Canberra, Federal Government.

The Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, Darwin, Canberra and Dili, Timor Leste.

Palladium Group, Workforce Development Program, Dili, Timor Leste.

Cardno, Labour Mobility Assistance Program, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Federal Government.
Executive Summary
The 2016/2017 Seasonal Worker Program Pilot Project, funded by the NT Government, Department of Trade, Business and Innovation was undertaken to meet the below objectives;

- The Pilot Project developed the capacity of the farming and hotel industries to access the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), with a key focus on developing the access to labour from Timor Leste.
- The NT horticulture industry recorded a 33% increase in seasonal workers over the pilot project period (twelve months). This included a 58% increase in Timor Leste seasonal workers.
- Businesses were case managed across the NT; informed, consulted and supported. A total of five hospitality employers were case managed, one submitted an application was declined the opportunity. A total of ten horticulture employers were case managed, two of the trailblazers whom submitted their applications approx. two years ago have suffered delays accessing the seasonal workforce due to bureaucracy.
- In the NT there has been a 50% increase in Approved Employers and a 16% increase in Employers accessing the program via Contractors.
- An Issues Register has been created from Employers experiences and proposed solutions provided to improve the SWP (see Appendix T Issues Register).

As both the Australian Hotels Association of the NT (AHANT) and NT Farmers Association (NTFA) lobbied for support to utilise the SWP these industry associations were provided with the resource of a Workforce Planning Coordinator (reporting to the NTFA Chief Executive Officer).

Background
Seasonal Worker Programme
The Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) offers Australian employers in the agriculture sector and employers in selected locations in the accommodation and tourism sectors access a reliable, returning workforce when there is not enough local Australian labour to meet seasonal demand. These workers can come from participating Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste.

The SWP complements Australia’s broader aid program, fostering economic growth, developing the private sector, and contributing to resilience in the Pacific. Circular labour mobility is vital to Pacific island countries – providing employment experience, marketable skills and remittances back to the region. It strengthens people-to-people ties and contributes to deeper regional integration.

In 2016 the Federal Government (Developing Northern Australia white paper) made the following changes to better address seasonal labour shortages in the north.
- expand and streamline the Seasonal Worker Program to support seasonal industries, including in agriculture, tourism and hospitality
- Expand and streamline the Seasonal Worker Program by reducing costs to business, increasing worker numbers and allowing more countries and industries to participate.

More needs to be done to provide access to these workers, considering the variants employers have. For example farmers have reported that they cannot determine harvest dates in advance. “We can’t predict that far in advance the number of staff required and the dates required. There are a lot of variants, the length of time the workers are required, the amount of income available due to variables such as weather, market prices and costs. The completion date is also unpredictable”. NT Employer
The Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) was copied from New Zealand and implemented in a top-down way, it should have been developed from the ground up with strong employer involvement. Farmers and Hoteliers are partners in the program and need to be treated as such. “Instead of preaching about the visa options available, Government should engage with the Employers from both the horticulture and hospitality industries in the Northern Territory to determine what would suit their circumstances to succeed.”

Northern Territory
The Northern Territory is unique because
- Population is low (approximately 1% of Australia’s population is located in the NT)
- It is diverse
- It is remote
- Of its location to Asian markets
- Multi-cultural, the Territory is made up of many cultures, these cultures meld together better than anywhere else, there is no segregation of suburbs or schools, everyone gets on and there is little discrimination because of culture. There is community support for circular migrants
- The weather is a factor that keeps many people from visiting and relocating here, the high humidity levels are hard to handle at certain times of the year
- The high cost of living
- The work is seasonal, especially in the Top End

Developing Northern Australia is important not just for the NT economy but Australia’s economy. Having access to a workforce that can relocate temporarily to perform the seasonal work will increase the productivity in the NT and Northern Australia.

Another item which is unique to The Northern Territory is the remoteness some of the Employers face. Some farmers are located 5 hours’ drive to the closest shopping centre, to travel to these locations from other capital cities can take over one full day. This can mean that the costs to transport the employees to the worksite are quite expensive and weekly trips to town, to meet the pastoral care requirement, are not feasible.

The Northern Territory consists of Darwin, the capital city, this gateway to Asia is very transient both for international travelers and Australians from interstate who may visit for a holiday or relocate for a period e.g. Australian Defence Force personnel. Within 100km there is Litchfield National Park with Batchelor as the township, as well as tourism and hospitality there is horticulture in this area. The rural area of Darwin is where a lot of Vietnamese farmers grow Asian vegetables and mango trees can be found in abundance. Jabiru to the East services as a base for visitors to Kakadu National Park and Arnhemland. Approximately 300km south of Darwin is Katherine which attracts traveler’s due to Nitmiluk National Park and its location being the three-way point of south, north and west. Farming has been a staple in the area for many years. Along the Stuart Highway accommodation is available for the weary traveler. Further south towards Alice Springs are growing areas of Ali Curung and TiTree. Alice Springs (approximately 1500km south of Darwin) in Central Australia services tourism thanks to nearby natural wonders such as Uluru and Kata Tjuta. There are some fruit and vegetables grown outside of Alice Springs. Surrounding areas of the Stuart Highway are home to the agriculture industry.
The Top End’s climate is different to Central Australia, where the centre of Australia is desert country, the average maximum mid-year of 25 degrees celcius and minimum of 0 degrees celcius (overnight). From October to March the temperature is usually 35 degrees during the day, with a minimum of 20 degrees celcius overnight. The Top End has a tropical monsoonal climate, a dry and wet season, the ‘dry’ is from May to October which is the tourist season with an average daily temperature of 32 degrees celcius. During the ‘wet’ humidity rises as high as 98 percent and the temperature can reach 39 degrees celcius between November and April.¹

Local workers don’t want to do this manual and menial work in great numbers anymore, it is low status, low paid, in difficult conditions and short-term casual work that doesn’t give them any job security. Local workers tend to work in year-round employment such as NT Government Departments. Various Northern Territory industries rely upon their peak season to produce a profit; the tourism industry, the construction industry and the horticulture industry. Although seasonal it is a reliable source of income as it recurs annually.

Horticulture Industry

Horticulture commenced in the NT in approximately 1980. The industry consists of various commodities including mangoes, melons, citrus, tropical fruits and vegetables.

The lack of harvest labour, ongoing changes to regulations; visas and taxes, are a huge problem for the industry. There is broad support for a National Agriculture Visa from unions, local and federal Government, National Farmers Federation (NFF). A bipartisan agreement has been recommended at the federal level through NFF.

The horticulture industry (on a national level through Growcom) is working towards a Fair Farms Initiative, this is an accreditation process, where each business will be audited to gain certification and remain certified, the farm must demonstrate compliance to Fair Work and Work Health and Safety legislation including accommodation for employees.

Local labour supply is rare, some farms source locals short term, most are family members. The current certificates of horticulture don’t meet farmer’s needs. NT Farmers Association are working towards improving the certification to be more fit for purpose. Recently adding harvest modules to the qualification. The industry is not attractive to the younger generation leaving high school and going to university. Marketing of the industry is required highlighting the variety in the roles, the use of robotics and promoting it as a challenge.

Some Farmers have noted a decline in work ethic amongst working holiday makers (WHM) which has resulted in some preferring the seasonal worker (via the SWP). The fact that the WHMs are millennials may also contribute to the issue. During their life, they have had consistent access to information technology, they have not been accustomed to physical labour and the great outdoors.

Recorded in the NT Farmers 2015/2016 Annual Report
- 6000 staff were required to fill 3900 positions
- $83million was spent on wages for the 2015/2016 financial year

“Picking, packing and grading work is low-skilled, physically demanding, occurs in challenging weather conditions and is often characterised by long hours and a low level of trade union oversight and representation. The remote location of many vegetable farms compounds the inability of local workers to access jobs on these farms and the vulnerability and isolation of temporary migrant workers employed on them. As much of the vegetable industry’s workforce is temporary migrants on either a WHM visa or a SWP visa, they are less likely to be informed and to report instances of exploitation to the authorities for fear of losing their source of income or visa extension.”

Farmers statements
“The Seasonal Worker Program works!”

“I don’t need to use the SWP as I have plenty of workers available.” (Good employers don’t have a labour issue due to their reputation and systems in place, such as social media to maintain contact with backpackers).

“the SWP needs to be modified to suit us Territory Farmers, our mango harvest season can sometimes be only four weeks, under the SWP requirements this is not long enough for the employees to earn enough money to make a profit once they deduct their expenses, a solution would be to share these employees between farms; they could work in Darwin’s rural area during mango harvest then Katherine, which should give them two month’s work, earning enough money to take home. Under the SWP guidelines sharing the employees is not an option”

“One of the requirements is to provide as a minimum, an average of 30 hours per week. The mango harvest is during October, November which is the build-up, weather can be unpredictable, if it rains for days we cannot provide work or pay the workers for sitting it out.”

Hospitality Industry
The hospitality industry in the NT includes accommodation and food and beverage services.

The hospitality industry has not taken up the SWP to date, with the inability to meet the accommodation requirement being one of their major issues; there is a lack of accommodation in areas of the NT during seasonal periods.

The fact that the hospitality industry is seasonal is unique compared to other states in Australia. In the Northern Territory during the wet season October to April accommodation occupancy sits at 51% on average (2015/2016). During the dry season, May to September accommodation occupancy sits at 70% (2015/2016)³.

Statistics on accommodation occupancy in Alice Springs for March 2017 stated 76%, two hotels visited in late March advised that they were at 100% occupancy at that time.⁴ The ABS accommodation statistics for the NT are also 76% for Hotels in the September quarter of 2015.⁵ However, these sources are only for Hotels and Motels with 10+ rooms and do not reflect the accommodation sector as a whole as they do not include backpackers/hostels, caravan parks and shared accommodation.

Some regions experience 100% occupancy, there is no other accommodation (to house staff). Most businesses choose to collect an income from a hotel room rather than have employees living-in them.

⁴ http://createsend.com/t/t-3056D3E5866A6655
⁵ ABS – Tourist Accommodation Cat 8635.8
This Pilot Project received little interest from the NT hospitality industry, the SWP is not the preferred source of workers due to easier options available to the Employers; working holiday maker visas and work and holiday maker visas. A regional Hospitality Employer stated “I can get twelve months out of a worker due to the allowances with the visa (because of our regional location, the visa holder can stay twelve months extra).

The AHANT is vitally interested in addressing labour and skills shortages in the hospitality industry in the NT. Industry surveys undertaken by the AHANT over the past 12 months have indicated a consistent and ongoing high need for staff in entry level or similar positions, and with also a strong demand for staff to fill skilled and supervisory positions. There is a strong industry preference, with associated benefits in terms of turnover and training, to employ locals, to build local staff capacity at all employment levels, and to reduce the industry’s reliance on other competing interest groups (with respective supporting Government policy or programs) from overseas and student worker, seasonal worker and working holiday maker (WHM) employment sources. However, for a considerable foreseeable future, local supply will not meet labour market demand in the hospitality sector. There will continue to be a demand for non-local staff in the industry, as entry level/unskilled, and skilled and supervisory/ management staff demand cannot be met with local workforce supply.

NT Hospitality Labour Market Overview

- The hospitality and tourism sector in the Northern Territory employ approximately 16,000 people, equivalent to 12% of the Territory’s workforce.
- 70% of hospitality businesses surveyed by the AHANT in late 2015 and early 2016 have reported of a strong expectation of business growth, with an associated expectation of jobs growth at minimum an estimate of 12% projected growth in accommodation and food services to 2020, which is likely to significantly impact the hospitality sector, or approximately another 2000 staff or 500 per year.
- The hospitality and tourism sector in the Northern Territory experiences significant difficulty in attracting and retaining large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled staff, as well as more skilled and supervisory and managerial level staff. The average turnover in the skilled, supervisory and/or managerial staff cohorts is 55% per year, or approximately 2,000 staff per year.
- For 6000 unskilled position's there were 12,000 workers.

Room occupancy rate; Hotels Motels and Serviced Apartments with 15 or more rooms; Northern Territory; Total (Accommodation Class); Quarters

This Pilot Project received little interest from the NT hospitality industry, the SWP is not the preferred source of workers due to easier options available to the Employers; working holiday maker visas and work and holiday maker visas. A regional Hospitality Employer stated “I can get twelve months out of a worker due to the allowances with the visa (because of our regional location, the visa holder can stay twelve months extra).
Workforce surveys completed by AHANT members between late 2015 and mid 2016 indicate extremely high numbers of skilled, supervisory and managerial positions remaining unfilled, one survey of only 80 businesses reporting over 500 positions in this cohort being unfilled at the end of 2015.

The overall annual turnover of staff and projected growth requirements in the NT hospitality industry is greater than 50% of current staff, greater than 8,000 staff.

The VET system and school leavers account for no more than 10% of the entry level supply with higher level VET participants providing less than 5% of potential staff in the skilled cohort of the industry.

Programs aimed at skilling young unemployed to be “job ready” have not made a significant impact on hospitality staff supply. The often seasonal, and casual nature of many entry level positions mitigates against criteria for employment support from Government funded programs. On an annual basis across the NT the hospitality industry expects significantly less than 100 new staff will be sourced from job active or transition to work type programs over the next 4 years.

Even a strongly supported and work experience focused pre-employment program in a regional town did not result in any long term successful recruitment to hospitality positions, despite a successful completion and 100% offers of employment.

As an additional example, of the estimated 400 long term unemployed youth, from the Darwin cohort, expected to be participants in the new PaTH program staring April 2017, it is expected that 100 participants may focus on hospitality and retail pathways, over 4 years – or 25 per year.

The existing impediments for greater participation by Indigenous Territorians in the hospitality workforce, including local and community obligation issues, will not be remedied in the short to medium term. To date the success of Indigenous hospitality training strategies by Voyages at Yulara has improved Indigenous workforce participation, but not necessarily Indigenous Territorian participation.

NT hospitality businesses report significant difficulties in attracting Australian residents as employees. A 2011 survey by Deloitte of the Australian Tourism Labour Force indicates that NT businesses employ 25% less local residents that Australian business in the tourism and hospitality industry.

There are stronger trading periods and staffing requirements between May – September in the NT, applying in major centres, regional towns and remote wayside inns. This seasonality (70% businesses) is significantly higher than experienced elsewhere in Australia (51% businesses) on average.

Regional businesses in particular have significant difficulty in recruiting local or Australian resident staff and rely heavily on WHM.

Major hotel developers have committed to investing into building more accommodation hotels in the NT. The current impediment to this investment is the high risk of not having a sufficient labour force to operate all of the hotels.

In summary, local employment supply cannot meet demand in the NT hospitality industry.\(^6\)

Small Business
Some of the criteria seem pointed to medium to large enterprises when nationally, 97.4% of the businesses were small. The NT is unique as most businesses are small business, although they service a large customer base and harvest a large amount of fruit/vegetables the numbers of Employers are surprisingly small.
In June 2015, 95.7% of businesses in the NT were small businesses, 4.2% were medium businesses and 0.1% were large businesses.\(^7\)

- Accommodation and Food Services (Division H) had the highest entry rate at 19.2%.
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (Division A) had the lowest entry rate at 7.0%.
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (Division A) recorded the lowest entry rate and was one of only four industry divisions to experience a decrease in business counts in 2015-16.

Small businesses don’t have a human resources department or inhouse lawyers to help navigate the system. They don’t have IT systems for customer requests, they answer customer requests personally as with 99% of their business. During harvest or tourist season these small businesses balloon in size to meet the custom or harvest the produce. In some cases, the owner is still the only person managing everything.

Each business has their own unique situation which includes location, season, lack of transport or accommodation, timing and weather.

Risks
To NT horticulture industry; without labour, produce cannot be harvested. This results in a monetary loss to the farmers who invested in the crop.

The employment of workers from overseas must not take opportunities from Australians looking for work, the Seasonal Worker Program has an Australian Jobseeker first approach, hence labour market testing must prove the inability to source locals.
In regional area’s some communities rely on backpacker trade, the backpackers that are working in the area generally spend money in the area, not just on groceries but entertainment. It has been reported that the seasonal workers do not spend their income on entertainment, instead taking their remittance home. Although the seasonal workers do purchase groceries, some areas in Australia have seen business opportunities arise by supplying the seasonal workers with specific products. The reduction in income in these regional areas maybe significant enough to see business closures, unless the businesses adapt.

The Pilot Project term of one year was not long enough to case manage Employers from the initial ‘Potential Host Employer’ stage to the final stage when the ‘Employees return home’. For example, the mango harvest season commences in September/October this is not enough time to get those Employers to apply and applications approved (as application approval can take 3 to 4 months).
There was a risk of hearing one view (the squeaky wheel). The Workforce Planning Coordinator contacted various Employers (members and non-members of the Associations involved) throughout the twelve-month period to hear all views. The majority view is reflected in this report and the challenges and solutions attached as Appendix T.

Future risk;

The project has identified there is a lack of workplace relations support to the NT horticulture industry, with continuous changes to legislation; work health and safety, food standards, etc. It is hard for the farmer, which can be one person, to maintain currency.

Most farms are small to medium size and do not have a dedicated Human Resource Manager to keep up to date with legislation changes and manage the influx of workers during harvest season. There are the following options

1. Utilise a Labour Hire Company who will pay wages, super, payroll tax etc. The use of registered labour hire companies minimises the burden on employers to provide pastoral care, travel, accommodation and the processing of wages.
2. Hire a qualified Human Resource Manager during harvest season.
3. It is recommended that a Workforce Relations Manager provide this important support to the farmers through the NT Farmers Association as Growcom does in Queensland.

NT Farmers Association with the assistance of Industry Skills and Advisory Council of the NT (ISACNT) are working on a Workforce Development Plan. This document will forecast labour requirements for the industry.

Both NTFA and AHANT provide their members with online Employment Relations resources, AHANT to a higher degree.

The ever-growing list of requirements Employers must perform

- register with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to pay workers from overseas and
- pay a levy to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) to employ workers from overseas

Let alone the maze of computerized registration systems, is not only time consuming but also unsuitable for those Employers who do not have a reliable internet connection or IT skills.

The continuous changes to the various visa’s available to employ workers from overseas is a risk to businesses, if not informed of the changes the businesses can be non-compliant. Here is a timeline of the various changes the Department of Immigration and Border Protection made to working visa’s over the last twelve months which affect businesses.

19/11/2016 Seasonal Worker Programme Visa changed from 416 to 403
18/04/2017 Abolition and replacement of 457 visa
19/05/2017 Temporary Activities Sponsor – all businesses must register to employ workers from overseas as a Temporary Activities Sponsor

The 2017 NT skilled occupation priority list has seen the removal of various occupations, which affects both NT Employers and overseas workers.

Possible legislative and other impediments

The below information is from ‘Sustainable Solutions - The Future of Labour Supply in the Australian Vegetable Industry Report’ dated February 2017 which recommends a comprehensive reform to the Seasonal Worker Programme. As per the recommendations to a comprehensive reform Package One, the SWP would have greater uptake by NT Employers if

- The requirements were guidelines; flexible to each Employers circumstance

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There was one Federal Government Agency involved
There was a point of contact in the NT
The time taken to achieve ‘Approved Employer’ status is reduced

The Australian Government is aiming to improve access to jobs for Australians.

Australian Government response to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration report: Seasonal change Inquiry into the Seasonal Worker Programme February 2017
Impact on the Australian labour force

Recommendation four:
The Committee recommends that the Australian Government allocate funds to establish a three-year pilot programme for 17-24 year olds to train and work in the agricultural sector, a ‘Future Force’, similar to the Green Army programme model with appropriate adjustments.

The Government notes this recommendation.

The Government agrees that attracting, employing and retaining local labour in the broad agriculture sector is vital to ensuring that the industry remains sustainable in the long term. The Seasonal Work Incentives for Jobseekers pilot will provide incentives for young jobseekers to undertake seasonal work in the horticultural industry.

The Government also has a range of initiatives to support young people into employment:

- job active providers across Australia have the flexibility to tailor their services to a job seeker’s assessed needs to assist them take up employment, including seasonal employment opportunities;
- Transition to Work is a new service to support young people aged 15–21 on their journey to employment. The service will provide intensive, pre-employment support to improve the work-readiness of young people and help them into work (including apprenticeships and traineeships) or education;
- Empowering YOUth Initiatives support new, innovative approaches to help unemployed young people aged 15 to 24 years to improve their skills and move toward sustainable employment; and
- a new Youth Jobs PaTH (Prepare – Trial – Hire) to support young job seekers into jobs will start from 1 April 2017.

Recommendation seven:
That the Australian Government standardise the labour market testing requirements across the range of temporary work visas.

- The Government notes this recommendation.
- The purpose of labour market testing is to ensure that overseas workers are a supplement to, and not a substitute for, Australians. As the report of Joint Committee notes, ‘the requirement to undertake market testing is not overly burdensome’ (Section 9.27).
- The variation in labour market testing requirements reflects a range of factors, primarily the duration and skill level of employment opportunities and the purpose of the visa programme that an employer is looking to utilise. For example, the community would reasonably expect the labour marketing testing requirements to vary according to whether an employer is seeking one highly skilled individual for up to four years (under a 457 visa) compared to short term, seasonal opportunities for a number of unskilled or lower skilled positions (under a 403 visa for the Seasonal Worker Programme).
- In all cases employers’ recruitment practices must satisfy Australian equal opportunity, anti-discrimination and workplace relations laws. Vacancies and job advertisements published by Australia businesses cannot discriminate against Australian applicants and should not invite applications from persons holding certain types of temporary visas.

The Federal Government’s announcement on 18 April 2017 of the 457-visa abolishment and replacement shows the Government’s position on labour market testing; it will remain.
Evaluation
Achievements
Since the Seasonal Worker Program Pilot in 2012 the number of seasonal workers in Australia has increased every year.

Table 1 Total Number of seasonal workers in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yearly No. Seasonal Workers</th>
<th>Yearly % Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>3,177</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>4,490</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>*4,670</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* To 22 May 2017

The number of seasonal workers in Australia from Timor Leste have increased considerably, five years ago there were approximately 21 seasonal workers from Timor Leste, in 2017 there is estimated to be 530 seasonal workers from Timor Leste in Australia. At 31 May 2017, there were 25 Seasonal Workers working in the NT from Timor Leste.

Table 2 Seasonal workers in Australia and the Northern Territory from Timor Leste

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>NT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>approx. 530</td>
<td>approx. 183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This graph shows that a third of seasonal workers in the NT are from Timor Leste compared with the South Pacific.

Unfortunately, the SWP figures are not released by state due to confidentiality therefore it was not possible to compare the growth rate of the SWP between the NT and other states.
In 2016 NT Farmers have experienced a **33% increase** in workers from the South Pacific Islands and Timor Leste through the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP). Approximately 398 workers from 10 countries have been employed to pick fruit across approximately 12 farms.

Compared to 2015, the number of seasonal workers in the NT from Timor Leste in 2016 **increased by 58%**.

Out of the ten countries participating in the Seasonal Worker Program, as per the above graph, only five have provided workers to the NT. The total number of seasonal workers in the NT in 2016 was 398. In 2017 it is expected that workers from Fiji will also work in the NT through the program.
In the last three years as you can see by this chart one Employer (pale blue) no longer uses the seasonal workers as forestry is not permitted within the Seasonal Worker Program, therefore Approved Employer 2 (pale blue) no longer access the program. This has resulted in a reduction of work for Timor Leste workers in the NT and bad publicity for the program, created by unnecessary Government bureaucracy.

Employers have received pressure to increase the length of time the seasonal worker is required, this is unfair on the Employer and has resulted in Employers discontinuing the use of the program.

Table 3 Timor Leste Work Ready Pool as at 27 April 2017

| Horticulture | 1097 |
| Hospitality  | 454  |
| Total        | 1551 |

The Work Ready Pool is part of the Workforce Development Program which includes pre-departure briefing and training and is managed by Palladium Group. Continuous improvements are evident.

Having a dedicated Seasonal Worker Program resource in the NT was beneficial for many reasons:

- Resource sharing across industries
- Accessibility for Employers
- Strengthened relationships with various stakeholders such as the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste
- Proximity to Timor Leste
- Local knowledge and understanding of the issues faced
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Case Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality Employers</td>
<td>Up to 5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture Employers</td>
<td>Up to 5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Hire Company</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Distribution of industries participating in program**

**Horticulture Industry**

11 Employers with 398 workers 2016
13 Employers with 500 workers 2017 (estimated)

**Hospitality Industry**

0 Employers

A total of five hospitality employers were case managed, one applying within the pilot program timeframe (August 2016 to June 2017), unfortunately the application was declined because an item that should have been declared, was overlooked. Hospitality industry employers are not using the program neither directly nor through a labour hire contractor. One Employer withdrew due to other priorities. One business was sold. The remaining two are considering the program to fill their future labour needs.

Ten Employers from the horticulture industry were case managed, additional businesses were not in a position to apply in 2017 due to various reasons (personal and business) but are applying to have seasonal workers here for the 2018 season. There are currently three approved employers, three applications submitted two still working on applications and two withdrawn due to sourcing backpackers as labour for this season. Other Employers accessing the SWP but not recruiting from Timor Leste have been monitored (see graph below).

One Labour Hire Company was assisted by being funded to attend the Australian Employers Conference in Timor Leste in March 2017.

The number of Approved Employers accessing seasonal workers in the NT has increased in recent years as per the chart below.
A survey of NT Farmers Association members was undertaken in February 2017 which proved that approximately 40% of produce was not harvested in the 2016 mango season, the total crop loss is recorded at $3.3 million.

The labour shortage this past season was not due to a lack of labour, but rather mismanagement; demanding a lot of labour immediately, and too late in the season. They report that some growers were not being prepared and proactive in organising and assessing labour needs early in the season or before the season starts. They also allege that many farm managers misjudged their crop so their work force plans came undone.

Growers mentioned that they DO believe that they suffer from labour issues in general and that labour shortage will likely become a problem soon.

Two surveys were conducted on the seasonal workers, the surveys were conducted during employment in Australia on two separate businesses.
Case studies into the successful use of the seasonal worker program in both the horticulture and hospitality industries were completed and provided to Migration NT, Department of Trade, Business and Innovation in April 2017. Please see attached Appendices P and Q.

Acceptance

Low attendance at events by the hospitality industry shows that these stakeholders did not accept the process. Alternative engagement methods were used to engage with these members, for example a webinar was held to connect with those time poor, although not well attended the webinar was recorded and is available on the AHANT website.

The horticulture industry members regularly engaged. The fact that over 30 farmers attended the information session held in March 2017 at the Coolalinga Office of NT Farmers Association was proof of the interest in the Seasonal Worker Program (and another working visa’s).

Stakeholders found it helpful to have the one point of contact for the NT region; some suggesting increasing the area to Northern Australian. The co-share arrangement with AHANT worked well, it is recommended to include the tourism industry for future projects.

By signing up to the Seasonal Worker Program businesses are guaranteeing their workforce, this investment is not information businesses are willing to share with others.

Budget

The operational budget for the pilot project was $73,100, as per the table below. These funds have been spent during the project timeframe of July 2016 to June 2017 on engagement with NT Employers from both the horticulture and hospitality industries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>ANNUAL BUDGET</th>
<th>SPENT</th>
<th>BALANCE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel- Motor Vehicle</td>
<td>$21,840</td>
<td>$19,740</td>
<td>$2,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel- Airfares &amp; Accommodation</td>
<td>$26,300</td>
<td>$22,458</td>
<td>$3,841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project General Expenses</td>
<td>$24,960</td>
<td>$24,930</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$73,100</td>
<td>$67,128</td>
<td>$5,971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* from 31 March to 27 June

will be acquitted with an audited financial report by 31 August 2017
Methodology
Stage 1 stakeholder meetings and research into the program, associated policies (e.g. Developing Northern Australia) and visa regulations.
Stage 2 case studies; were produced by the Workforce Planning Coordinator but not approved for publishing by the funding body.
Stage 3 case management; the creation of resources for Employers, the translation of Government terminology, offering a one point of contact who could visit site and understand the issues that affect the business.

Table 6 Employer Engagement Process

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>Initial Enquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult</td>
<td>First Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td>Support throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
<td>Advocate for change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the International Association of Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) Community Engagement Model

Engage with members of AHANT and NTFA. Promoted the SWP by being in the media eight times, educated Employers on the SWP requirements through various means of contact (see below). Case managed those willing to sponsor seasonal workers through the program. The following methods were used as per the Engagement Plan.

Engagement methods included visits to work sites with over 16,000 kilometres travelled by road
3000 emails, 2000 phone calls, various presentations, a webinar, an industry forum and networking at events such as the AHANT trade show. Regular articles in industry magazines, electronic newsletters and social media, the analytics are 83 Facebook likes and the top Tweet made 306 impressions and 3 re-tweets.

Executives are reluctant to provide information as there are not many players in the NT business community, it is important for their commerce to keep information private.

Table 7 Major Events during the SWP Pilot Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 &amp; 25 Aug 2016</td>
<td>Pre-Mango Season Meeting with Australian Mango Industry Association. Introduction to SWP Pilot Project</td>
<td>Katherine &amp; Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Oct 2016</td>
<td>Farmers meet with Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP Shadow Minister of Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Coolalinga, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Oct 2016</td>
<td>Workforce Planning Coordinator and Migration NT Representative visited Timor Leste engaging with stakeholders in the SWP</td>
<td>Timor Leste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 &amp; 21 Dec 2016</td>
<td>Meetings with seasonal workers on farm, interviews conducted</td>
<td>Acacia Hills, NT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Seasonal Worker Programme NT Pilot Project Evaluation and Lessons Learnt Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 Feb 2017</td>
<td>SWP Farmers Forum where 23 Farmers from the Top End and Katherine workshopped the SWP</td>
<td>Katherine, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Mar 2017</td>
<td>Australian Employer Conference Coordinated and funded eight NT Employers from both Hospitality and Horticulture industries to attend including a visit to farms, escorted by the Timor Leste Department of Agriculture and visits to Training Centres</td>
<td>Timor Leste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 to 31 Mar 2017</td>
<td>Migration Information Session Roadshow for the Hospitality and Horticulture Industries</td>
<td>Alice Springs to Darwin, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 to 26 May 2017</td>
<td>Reference Group Meeting, Labour Mobility Assistance Program, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Jun 2017</td>
<td>Meetings with seasonal workers on farm, survey conducted</td>
<td>Katherine, NT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NT Employers at the Australian Employer Conference listening to translated speech from Sr. Ilidio Da Costa, Secretary of State, Democratic Republic of Timor Leste.

### Outcomes

For the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation the project was invaluable. The volume of work actioned on the SWP in the NT. Having a specialist of the SWP was one less visa the under resourced department of Migration NT had to deal with. The information to brief Ministers with was prepared.

**Increased knowledge of the SWP**

Thanks to the Pilot Project there has been a lot more activity and media focus, informing the public of the seasonal workers that come into the Territory for short term work. Public knowledge has increased.

With the Workforce Planning Coordinator acting as a Liaison Officer the Employers have a better understanding of their requirements of the Seasonal Worker Program. At the Katherine Farmers Forum meeting on 22 February 2017 when asked “what level of new knowledge or understanding
did you gain about Seasonal Worker Program?” 79% of attendees leaned towards a significant amount.
This can also be measured by the increase in applications to the Seasonal Worker Program.
Other Stakeholders have been better informed of the Employers feedback, by having the Workforce Planning Coordinator engage with the Employers and take that feedback to the Stakeholders. E.g. Labour Mobility Assistance Program, Reference Group Meeting, Melbourne, May 2017.

**Satisfaction with the engagement**
Engagement activities were evaluated by the attendees. Results from the Katherine Farmers Forum show that the expectation from all attendees of the day was to learn from those experienced in the Seasonal Worker Program. The expectation of learning was met, with 99% of the participants satisfied with the event. 82.5% of participants stated that the forum was highly relevant to them and their business. Feedback forms were positive and included a thank you for the opportunity to link with farmers from another growing area.

**Reasons NT Hospitality Industry Employers have not taken up the SWP**
Hoteliers didn’t uptake the assistance because they did not require the assistance, the lack of access to labour was not as prominent as in the horticulture industry.
Most hospitality businesses
- are located in regional towns where there is good access to transportation and pastoral services.
- Have reliable connectivity to the internet and are competent at navigating the various systems such as website registrations and application forms.
- Have medium to high English language levels and are moderately to highly educated.
- Have access to labour; many working holiday makers, university students and locals.

The work has a reputation of being social and fun.

“The comparative red tape ease in which student and working holiday workers can be employed without employers having to be registered and complete significant application forms is a real problem.” 9 May 2017
Des Crowe, Chief Executive Officer, AHANT

**Unintentional Outcomes**
For the Horticulture industry, this role was extremely effective, exceeding Key Performance Indicators. The Members tapped into the resource above and beyond the Seasonal Worker Program treating the Workforce Planning Coordinator as a resource for any information on labour. Farmers did utilize the assistance because of the challenges they face including remoteness, the lack of connectivity of internet access and low education levels; IT Skills to navigate Government websites, English grammar; the ability to decipher Government terminology.
The Workforce Planning Coordinator acted as an Industry Liaison Officer between Government, Stakeholders and the Members.

The diversity of Employers involved in the Pilot Project was large from Farmers located 500km from the nearest town to Hoteliers in regional towns. English is a second language to some Employers for example the Vietnamese Farmers.
The creation of linkages between the Northern Territory and other stakeholders, for example the Workforce Planning Coordinator was the only NT representative at the Labour Mobility Assistance Program Reference Group Meeting. This is an important role to ensure the NT Employers voice is heard on an international level on a foreign aid program.

Another unintentional outcome was the co-operation of the industries; holding events where both were present especially in regional areas formed new partnerships for example a hotel could house seasonal workers for a farm that does not have accommodation. At the SWP Farmers Forum in Katherine an accommodation supplier provided a verbal reference for the seasonal workers “we have been accommodating seasonal workers for the last four years from Vanuatu and Samoa with 60% being returning workers, they know us, they know the place, they know our standards, they keep the new workers in line, we rarely have any problems.” Brian Hill, Managing Director, Manbulloo Homestead, Katherine, NT.

A farm produce tour was held in November 2016 with AHANT members attending, gaining information and contacts for local produce. In follow-up, the AHANT Trade Show held in June 2017 hosted a NT Local Produce Booth for Local Producers to display and advertise their wares for use in local restaurants and cafés, again providing the link between the farm and the plate. Chefs used the local produce to prepare tasting plates for participants to taste the freshness in the food. Another local farm produce tour is planned for September/October 2017, where NTFA will facilitate farm visits for AHANT.

Prior to the Australian Employers Conference in Timor Leste the Workforce Planning Coordinator arranged for the Horticulture Employers to visit the farming areas with Representatives from the Department of Agriculture so that they could see first-hand the methods used in Timor and the availability of water and tools, the environment and connection.

The Workforce Planning Coordinator also arranged for the Hospitality Employers to visit the Hospitality Training School, again so that the Employers could understand what the seasonal workers are taught, what training they have access to and to make connections.

During the Australian Employers Conference the networking between the Horticulture Employers and the Hospitality Employers proved valuable for both parties. For example, a hospitality employer gained a local produce supplier and the horticulture employer gained a customer.

One Farmer suggested that the seasonal workers gain a Certificate II in Horticulture including four weeks practical training over a six-month period. Although some seasonal workers hold a Certificate II or higher in hospitality this is not related to the seasonal worker program. The logistics of this study is possible although the Certificate is not offered in country therefore the study would be conducted in Australia. Opportunity would depend on the working hours required by the Employer.

Lessons learnt

The problem was not a lack of awareness, nor the availability of assistance to businesses (the NT Government offers support to NT businesses via start, run, grow with small business champions and other services for medium to large enterprises including grants). Across both industries and although labour is a big issue, the issue has not been prioritized by the Employers, with Employers not investing the time to it. The sheer amount of legislation and documentation these businesses have to deal with, (which is tenfold once employing staff is added to the list of things to do) and the constant changes to legislation is hard to keep up with. Perhaps this is one reason many NT
businesses did not attempt to apply for the SWP, as once that overwhelming amount of paperwork was submitted, (or on an annual basis) was the further adherence needs to be met.

Each business has its unique issues including location, transport, language barriers, limited internet access, IT skills and education. There needs to be understanding of Employers situations and more flexibility when considering applications with these exceptional circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>In future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of local labour</td>
<td>The NT Government has made local jobs a priority, Training NT and ISACNT are focused on how locals can get employment outcomes. In particular the wish to work with industry to reduce its long-term reliance on overseas workers through greater training of locals through employment. Federally the Department of Employment is also working on how locals can get more seasonal jobs.</td>
<td>Both Government’s to continue and enhance efforts, e.g. commencing 1 July 2017 a Department of Employment program for jobseekers: seasonal-worker-incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality industry not interested due to onerous administration involved in SWP, can hire WHM's easier (without registration and application)</td>
<td>Reduce SWP administration</td>
<td>Promote to Labour Hire Companies and promote to hospitality Employers to utilise via the Labour Hire Contractor. Advocate for a reduction in administration for example duplication of recruitment plan (at application stage then again at the recruitment stage).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers not willing to share information. Investing in the SWP is a business decision to guarantee their workforce.</td>
<td>Gain trust of Employers by proving that their information is safe with you</td>
<td>Continue Workforce Planning Coordinator role to maintain relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program is suited to medium-large businesses.</td>
<td>The businesses can be governed from interstate, hence including another stakeholder into the mix.</td>
<td>Recognise suitable businesses, perhaps within the workforce plan the structures or sizes could be identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are many stakeholders in the SWP, some do not know or fully understand what the others are doing.</td>
<td>Co-operate with stakeholders in the SWP.</td>
<td>It would be beneficial if all Departments were aware of the Pilot Project and privy to the results as they are released (quarterly). Information needs to be shared e.g. upcoming changes to visa's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Employers are contacted by various LSU's and Agents</td>
<td>The identification of &quot;registered or legitimate agents&quot; should be provided.</td>
<td>These Employers need to be protected and educated to A. Ask for copy of registration certificate and B. seek a register of all agents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations

The following recommendations would help expand the SWP

- Seek to have employers approved and accredited for a minimum of five years and allow them access to all countries and visa categories, including the seasonal worker program. This would negate the need to apply every time a new scheme or visa category is changed or created. It is suggested that the pre-approval process be conducted in the NT perhaps by Migration NT (similar to the DAMA pre-approval process) to reduce the timeframe of application processing by the Department of Employment. This will ensure all applications are submitted in full the first time, saving time. The National Fair Farms Initiative managed by Growcom would be such pre-approval to ensure Horticulture Employers have compliant employment practices.

- Remove the foreign aid component of the program and use it as a pure foreign seasonal worker program. The New Zealand SWP is not based around foreign aid and is far more successful than the Australian program as it is focussed on bringing businesses and employees together for the purpose of work and not distribution of aid. The government’s objective of ensuring economic prosperity for foreign seasonal workers will still be achieved. Farmers are not in the business of delivering aid programs on behalf of Government. The objective of ensuring economic prosperity for our pacific neighbours will still be met. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade SWP is a 360 degree foreign aid program where seasonal workers can gain skills and funds to improve the economy in their country, it will remain.

- Members would like the local labour market testing component of the SWP removed. Given the Federal Government’s announcement of the 457 abolishment and replacement shows the Government’s position on labour market testing; it will remain. It is recommended to allow the state/territory industry body to perform this testing rather than burdening each employer with further administration and costs, the state/territory industry body could advertise by season e.g. this mango season (numbers of) pickers and packers are required in the following locations and approx. dates.

- Change the requirement time-frame of recruitment (currently 90 days prior) to be provided closer to the commencement date or allow the Employer to vary the number of workers, and length of stay as the season gets closer e.g. four weeks prior.

- Change the requirement of pre-purchasing return international airfares, due to the end of harvest being harder to predict than the onset of picking and weather can delay or diminish the harvesting of the crop, this airfare change can result in additional administration and costs to the Employer. It is suggested that a Trust fund as return airfare guarantee or cheaper flexible fares could be provided by Airline/s as a feel good or foreign aid donation.

- Identify options and expand the number of countries that foreign seasonal workers can be secured from. This is particularly important for ensuring that farmers get access to the best workers who are acclimatised to tropical conditions in the NT and have stronger cultural ties to local communities in the NT. If the foreign aid component of the program is removed, undertaking this is no longer an issue.

- Simplify the administrative processes by reducing the number of Departments that employers must work through, currently there are three, as well as the copious amounts of paper work. Although the Department of Employment is the primary administrator, they were not keeping up with the processing of SWP applications, there has been a noticeable improvement during the pilot project. The processing time of applications must remain within three months.
• Continue to enable Employers and Industry Representatives to **participate in the design** and development of the Seasonal Worker Program such as the Labour Mobility Assistance Program, ensuring in-country pre-departure training programs are fit for purpose. A work, health and safety induction similar to the construction industry induction white or blue card would benefit workers who come from overseas to Australian Safety Standards and the law.

• Recommended **improvements to the Work Ready Pool** include providing skill levels, work experience and detailed information on where the candidates are from (Suco, district and municipality).

• It is recommended that the Timor Leste Labour Attaché’ be based in Darwin to meet and assist seasonal workers arriving and departing through the Darwin airport. Flights from Timor Leste into Australia arrive in Darwin, therefore wherever the seasonal workers are going they can be accessed in Darwin. It is a culture shock for the new seasonal workers, a friendly face would alleviate their fears and provide a contact in Australia.

• On 6 May 2016, the Australian Government announced the commencement of a tourism pilot under the Seasonal Worker Programme, specifically for Northern Australia. This pilot is one of the workforce measures announced as part of the *White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*.

There is opportunity to include the tourism industry operators via Top End Tourism, Central Australian Tourism Industry Association, AHANT and Developing North Australia. Our Pacific neighbours welcome tourism into the fold of the SWP.

As per the Workforce Planning Coordinators reports to the NT Farmers Association Board the consistent recommendation was to continue the SWPPP or extend the pilot program for a longer trial period.

• Sep 2016 - It is recommended that NTFA continue to advocate for further funding for a longer trial period.

• Feb 2017 - It is recommended that NTFA continue to advocate for funding to provide this service to its members including extending the trial period of the Seasonal Worker Program Pilot Project to 30 June 2018 to ensure case management from application to employees return briefing.

• Mar 2017 - NT Farmers has engaged with the Minister of Department of Primary Industries and Resources’ office since January 2017 and advocated for the continuation of funding for the Workforce Planning Coordinator role over a five-year period. The Minister’s office has expressed support and is reviewing the Department of Primary Industries and Resources budget.

The Pilot Project model of having a locally based SWP Liaison Officer (within the industry bodies) is being studied by some of the Stakeholders involved in the SWP. The benefits include

- one point of contact who can provide assistance. Employers are humans and need to speak with a human who can meet face to face. The Employers prefer this to the online “contact us” option or phoning various departments based in Canberra.

- case management, regularly touching base with the participant employers to advise them of the next step in the application process. This will alleviate missed emails and time delays.

NT Farmers Association are advocating for

- A Primary Industry Visa be created to allow for international residents regardless of their country of origin to perform seasonal work with the option to return annually (pending sponsor), direct to Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

- The development of a (National) Employment Services Provider Certification through Recruitment & Consulting Services Association Australia to safeguard Employers.

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Various items regarding labour and workforce as per the policy position paper which can be found on the NT Farmers Association website.

NTFA are also facilitating Growcom’s Fair Farms Initiative (an accreditation system) which includes a workplace relations module with NT Horticulture Employers commencing in August 2017. This will assist in the Employers being pre-approved for programs including the SWP.

The Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (Government) are pro-active stakeholders in the programme with an aim to increase the amount of Timorese workers they continuously request feedback to improve their preferred country status in the Seasonal Worker Programme. In the past there have been allegations of corruption which Australian Employers are concerned about. For example seasonal workers being sent to Australia to work whom were were related to the Government Officials and were evidently not interested in working.

During the Australian Employers Conference in Dili the Timor Leste Government expressed interest in servicing the tourism industry in Australia to gain skills to develop the Timor Leste tourism industry.

The connections with the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (Government) and the NT Government are strong for example the NT Government funded English Language School SENAINT in Timor Leste. The only recommendation to improve the implementation of the Program between the NT and Timor Leste is to offer further incentives for Employers to recruit from Timor Leste.

Conclusion

It is understood that the Australian Government’s charter through the Department of Employment, is to get Australians jobs. Both the hospitality and horticulture industries are not denying Australians employment. The reason that the Employers have turned to other options like the Seasonal Worker Program is the fact that there simply are not the number of applicants available here in the NT.

It has been identified that not all businesses in the NT are “SWP ready” (from both industries). The assistance provided by the Workforce Planning Coordinator is sorely needed with much more improvement required in ethical employment practices (pending resources).

Each prospective participant has one or more unique situations which is not allowed for in the SWP. The ‘rules’ should be ‘guidelines’ which are flexible to each unique situation.

Relationships with stakeholders have been strengthened. In March 2017 NT Farmers visited Timorese Farmers with the Department of Agriculture as hosts, this was a good opportunity for the NT Employers to gain an understanding of what farming methods are used in Timor Leste. This helps the NT Employers when training the seasonal workers to provide instructions in an example that the seasonal workers can relate to as well as realising their goals.

Being invited to attend the (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) Labour Mobility Assistance Program, Reference Group Meeting, as a stakeholder, in May 2017 highlights the importance of the Workforce Planning Coordinators role in representing NT Employers.

Those Employers that applied prior to December 2016 did not receive any real feedback from the Department of Employment in relation to the status of their application within the two months of December 2016 and January 2017. This delayed those applications by two months. The Department
are aware of this concern and have advised verbally that future staffing arrangements over the Christmas period will be considered.

There are two examples of applications taking almost two years to cut through the red tape and become approved employers of the program, there were many legislative changes throughout this period which added to the time lapse, the Employers are guilty of delaying the process also, this identifies flaws in the process which could be improved by having an NT based SWP Liaison Officer. Well over 50% of applications are declined, the Department of Employment offer applicants to re-apply (in full) but most, do not, due to timeframes and annoyance at the bureaucracy.

Trailblazers in each industry took the opportunity to trial the program initially, some are also cultural ambassadors, the fact that these Employers were both declined and delayed highlights the problems with the program. These entrepreneurs were identified as potentially great NT Ambassadors of the program, for their industry, who could have promoted the program within their networks, instead, because of their experience with the program to date (the application) these Employers do not have a positive word to say about the program.

See updated Stakeholders Matrix including comments on relationships. Appendix Y.

The SWP Pilot Project met the following SWP Objectives.

Providing access to work opportunities in the Australian agriculture sector
Two of the Farmers who attended the Australian Employers Conference increased the amount of seasonal workers by approximately forty from Timor Leste for the 2017/2018 harvest seasons.

Contribute to the economic development of Timor Leste
A meeting was held with Investors in Timor Leste and NT Farmers who willingly provided recommendations on the most suitable commodities to grow and shared information on the process and requirements.

The Pilot Project developed the capacity of the farming and hotel industries to access the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), with a key focus on developing the access to labour from Timor Leste.

Case management of businesses across the NT occurred, assisting them to register as Approved Employers of the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP).

Issues have been tracked and solutions proposed to improve the SWP (see Appendix T Issues Register).

Appendix

Appendix P  Case study Horticulture Industry
Appendix Q  Case study Hospitality Industry
Appendix R  Survey of seasonal workers 2016
Appendix S  Survey of seasonal workers 2017
Appendix T  Issues Register
Appendix U  Summary of Media Exposure
Appendix V  Workplan & Reporting Requirements
Appendix W  Summary of Reports
Appendix X  Engagement Schedule
Appendix Y  Stakeholders Matrix v2
Appendix Z  Action Plan