

**Submission
No 578**

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mr Grant Mistler
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Dear Portfolio Committee No.2 – Health

RE: Inquiry into Health Outcomes and Access to Health and Hospital Services in Rural, Regional and Remote NSW

I welcome the open and free opportunities the NSW Parliament allows people to contribute towards our democratic processes and systems. Thank you for making time to focus on health across regional, rural and remote NSW.

For this inquiry, I wish to turn my mind towards the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme. These are complementary initiatives that began in 2012 and 2018 respectively at the Commonwealth level. The Seasonal Worker Programme is now uncapped, which means the annual limit to contracted guest workers was removed by the Commonwealth Government. There are inbuilt conditions on time limits, as well as taxation and location arrangements.

Guest workers arrive from countries such as Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Guest workers can be engaged within the accommodation, agriculture, aquaculture, cane, cotton and horticulture sectors, within certain regions and based on need. I am unsure how many guest workers resided and worked within NSW before the coronavirus disruption period. That could be a question on notice, if you wish.

The first point I wish to add to the inquiry here, is that we have a hidden and possibly overlooked population of temporary and mobile guest workers where English may not be their first language, and where their understanding of the health systems within their home countries may be quite different to our local realities under NSW Health. I am also concerned the guest workers may feel their right to employment, and their right to return to work in Australia again, is predicated on having perfect health here, and not being a 'nuisance' or a 'burden' while in Australia. That is a risk to the health of the guest workers, and we need to ensure their health is not being exploited unintentionally while they are here.

The second point I wish to add concerns the transfer and sharing of health informatics between Australian jurisdictions, and between Australia and their home countries, to ensure their health remains at the forefront of our duty of care, wherever they go, so no gaps occur.

My last point I wish to attend to is the history of blackbirding in Australia from the 19th century. Sydney Harbour was the first port of call for blackbirded South Pacific Islanders who built Australia's sugarcane industry by hand, and worked in other industries, at extremely low wages. Sydney Harbour is where they landed before being distributed elsewhere across the colonies to work in slave-like conditions, that the local population would not do, for those extremely low wages. The Scottish Ben Boyd is a local NSW example of a blackbirder who used slave labour. Ben Boyd brought around 200 men from what is now called New Caledonia and Vanuatu to work as shepherds and labourers on his properties around the Colony of NSW.

Not all blackbirded South Pacific Islanders were forcibly removed from Australia in the 20th century under the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1901. A sizeable number remained, and thrived, and their descendants carry those memories with them still to this day, as modern Australians with a blackbirded history of arrival and survival. Sydney and NSW have that legacy given to us from before Federation, and unintended similarities between then and now cannot be repeated.

I feel the recent mobile guest workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, do require our nuanced understanding, and their experiences across NSW should be included in this inquiry, as that would be a unique gap.

I propose the inquiry seeks clarification on the recent mobile guest worker experiences with health and hospital services across NSW, and I propose the inquiry seeks resolutions to include improving and strengthening outcomes and access for guest workers across NSW in the future.

Once again, I am pleased this inquiry is occurring this year, and I thank you for your dedicated focus and collaborative efforts to produce practicable solutions.

Yours faithfully

Grant Mistler