

Call to increase cap for New Zealand's Pacific seasonal worker scheme

By Jesse Doyle and Stephen Howes

1 August 2013

Declining rates of backpackers participating in New Zealand's horticultural sector have led industry to call for an increase to the cap imposed on the country's Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme.

This weekend Otago Daily Times reported that the existing 8,000-person cap on the program, which brings Pacific Islanders to NZ for seasonal work, has been labeled [inadequate by industry heavyweights](#).

For the 2012-2013 season, [8,175 visas were approved](#) and 7,456 seasonal workers arrived.

The call for a higher cap may be in vain, however, with both sides of politics strongly promoting a "New Zealanders first" policy in relation to jobs.

Last week Labour MP, Daniel O'Connor, reiterated [his party's stance on the issue](#). "With unemployment high it would not be fair on Kiwis looking for work to increase RSE numbers".

This week National MP and Minister for Immigration, Michael Woodhouse outlined the [same reasoning for maintaining the status quo](#). "This Government has always taken the view that we should demonstrate a duty of care for New Zealanders first".

With the unemployment rate currently at [6.2% compared to 3.7%](#) when the RSE scheme started and an election approaching in 2014, it seems as if the 8,000-worker cap is unlikely to be expanded in the foreseeable future.

The situation in NZ could not be more different to that of Australia, where annual intake under the Seasonal Worker Program has [reached only 1,500](#) and where the number of backpackers seems to be [increasing not falling](#), undermining prospects for the SWP.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/call-to-increase-cap-for-new-zealands-pacific-seasonal-worker-scheme-20130801/>

Date downloaded: 29 March 2024



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