

Pacific seasonal worker arrivals up, but look set to fall short

By Jesse Doyle
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The latest participation figures for Australia's Pacific Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) have just been released. Despite signalling an improvement on last year's figures, they still fall well short of what is required to reach the cap.

The figures reveal that 710 visas were granted to Pacific seasonal workers for the first half of FY 2013-14. This is an improvement of 150 or 26% over the same period last year. However, the cap has also expanded from 2,000 workers to 2,500 workers this financial year. This means in relative terms it is an increase of only 0.4%, well below what is needed.

The figures are likely to improve in the coming six months as the harvest season sets in across southern Australia. However, reaching the 2,500 worker cap would require a 152% increase in monthly visas granted - a prospect that seems unlikely at best.

Other worrying signs are that visa grants have so far only been higher for three months in 2013-14 than in the corresponding 2012-13 month, and been equal or lower in the other three. Most of the difference between July-December 2013 and July-December 2012 is explained by the fact that 115 visas were granted in July 2013 compared to none in July 2012, the first month of the new, permanent scheme.

These figures show that increasing the cap progressively means little if the demand is not there. As we've previously shown ([here](#)) and as participating countries are coming to realise ([here](#)), solving it will require a demand-side fix.

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