

The Survey of Vanuatu's Licensed Recruitment Agents, October 2018

The following report provides details of the responses to the survey of 20 New Zealand (RSE) licensed agents and 91 Australian (SWP) licensed agents, carried out in late October 2018. The survey was administered by email, which excluded one agent who do not have a listed email address. Emails were sent out initially on 17 October, with a follow-up emails on 18-20 October. These follow-up emails were sent to non-respondents to obtain their responses. Emails were also sent to respondents who had recruited workers since January 2018 to set up one-to-one interviews during the week of 22-26 October.

The survey sought answers from the agents to three questions:

- (1) How many workers you have recruited this year (from January 2018) to work in Australia or New Zealand?
- (2) Please tell me what difficulties you have experienced in recruiting workers?
- (3) What suggestions do you have to make the recruitment process work better?

The results

Of the 20 RSE licensed agents, 9 replied but only 7 responded to the questions, giving the survey a response rate of 35 per cent. Of the 91 SWP licensed agents surveyed, 55 replied to the email. However, three of these did not respond to the questions, so 52 usable responses were received, a response rate of 57 per cent.

For the RSE agents who responded to the questions, 5 out of 7 (71 per cent) said they had not been successful in recruiting workers to work in New Zealand since Jan 2018. Close to half of the SWP agents who responded to the survey questions (48 per cent) also had not been successful in recruiting workers to work in Australia so far in 2018.

Of the SWP agents surveyed who had recruited workers, the total was 1,831 which is considerably lower than the total number of visas approved by Australian Immigration between January and September 2018 was 2,895. The number of RSE visa approvals recorded by Immigration NZ over the same period was 3,390. This suggests that the RSE survey of agents did not get responses from the main agents involved in the RSE. Excluded from the survey were also direct employer recruiters, such as Seasonal Solutions.

So the findings presented below are the views of just over half of all licensed agents. It is likely that the results reflect in particular the concerns of the agents who have had major difficulty in finding employers in Australia and New Zealand. These were agents who failed to recruit any workers (30 in total) since January 2018 and agents who were only able to recruit a small number of workers over this period (11 agents only able to find work for 10 or less workers each).

The following results are presented in the words of the respondents, under the headings of:

1. Trouble making contact with farmers;
2. Problems on how the recruitment process works;
- Lack of finance;
4. Proposals for reform and
5. Good practice.

The text below is based on direct quotes from agents, showing the issues they have raised. The text has been only slightly edited to make it easier to read and to preserve the

respondent's anonymity. The quotes included below **should not be taken to mean** that the consultants agree with the agent's suggested course of action.

1. Trouble making contact with farmers

My difficulty is finding farmers and contractors as the ones I contacted have already made contacts with agents in Vanuatu. To make the recruitment process work better, I think that the Vanuatu Labour Dept should help the new agents find farmers and contractors to start us off.

I have contacted some 80 middlemen and farmers directly but no one seem interested...Farmers who have existing arrangements with Vanuatu agents see no reason to change loyalty to a new agent..

Although I was given a licence I was not able to find a farmer or contractor so I can work with him/her. There are two reasons for this-1) I think the market is saturated. 2) The existing contractors/farmers are happy with the current licence-holders and therefore they no longer require new ones. Unless new farmers are brought into the system by the assistance of the Aust and Vanuatu Govts it is not possible for new licence-holders to recruit new workers from Vanuatu to work in farms in Aust.

... most of the contractors and farms contacts provided by the Australian Government circulated through the Vanuatu Labour department to all of us are all occupied. Their only respond was we already have an agent or agents working with us. Or they will not respond at all. Getting a feedback from either a farmer or a contractor is quite difficult.

We have been facing difficulty in trying to make contacts with AE (Approved Employers) some of them are very difficult to convince. If we approach them they already have agent that they are working with and are happy with their Agents and cannot help us if we asked them for their help. It is very difficult because some of the AE have trust in their senior agents and cannot take new in takes because in there they will not waste their time training the new ones.

... the government allocating fair distribution of farmers to all agents.

... fairly allocate the farmers to agents. As some agents have more than 1 farmer and therefore their recruitment is focusing only on a certain group of people. This therefore does not give a fair chance to other good workers to participate.

Lack of information from the Vanuatu Labour Department to all the approved Vanuatu agents hence not evenly distributions of jobs in Australia and New Zealand to all the Vanuatu approved agents

In the month of May 2018 I travel to Wagga Wagga, expecting to find some farmers. Unfortunately, many farmers do not know about SWP and some knew about it but are NOT an approved employer.

Since we are new to the industry we do not know how to connect with Australian employers. This issue has been raised numerous times to the ESU but we have zero assistance from them. It is seems that many employers have already been working with other agents and are reluctant to work with more agents. It is not easy build trust with the employers in Australia.

Our search for farmers is not that easy. We were given a list of farmers who have registered

with the program in Australia and the Employment Services Unit gave us this list. The same farmers were repeatedly being contacted by the over 100 licensed agencies. Farmers did not welcome this very much as it became irritating for them. We did our own research to find farmers. The farmers never responded or did not answer our phone calls.

The process for farmers or interested Australians to become an approved employer in Australia is too difficult and complicated. too many criteria and requirements for them to follow. that is why many farmers do not register or neither interested individual or company to apply to become approved employers. As a result, very few farmers or approved employers are available recruit workers from the Pacific making this market very small. All Pacific islands share this few available farmers and or approved employers.

We hear of other agents sending 120, 200 or even 340 workers away at a time. We find it difficult to promote ourselves to agents in Australia when they are only able to recruit small numbers (obviously the newer agents/Employers in Australia).

When I obtained my license, the Vanuatu government gave me a list of Australian farmers to contact. We contacted all of them to which only about 5% responded stating they were not able to take in any workers.

It is too difficult to find approved employers. Assistance from both the Vanuatu & Australian Governments needs to come in here. At the current stage it is very evident that the Employers are hidden to new agents. When new Vanuatu agents are approved, they are expected that they have already approved contractors that will work for them. Information of the contractors will come late, better information like which contractors are willing to speak to new Vanuatu agents for example need to be made clear.

There are people who are interested in working in Australia, but I could not find or locate any single farmer despite numerous efforts on my part to find farmers.

We have been facing difficulty in trying to make contacts with AE (Approved Employers) some of them are very difficult to convince. If we approach them they already have agent that they are working with and are happy with their Agents and cannot help us if we asked them for their help. It is very difficult because some of the AEs have trust in their senior agents and cannot take new in takes because in there they will not waste their time training the new ones.

I haven't send anyone yet....I'm still looking out for farmers. I have met a couple in Adelaide, South Australia but don't hear from them yet. Early next year 2019, I will travel again to find any interested farmers or Labour Agencies.

Please tell me what difficulties you have experienced in recruiting workers?

Ans: I have not been able to find farmers in Australia. I have contacted people here and also in Australia but to no avail because of the systems in place in Australia. It seems that farmers have to be consulted more in how the system works and requirements from Australia.

Our main problem is not in Vanuatu but in Australia. We could not get any Approved Employer (AE) on board. Find an AE is our main problem since most of them are already tied to other Vanuatu agents. We have plans to travel to Melbourne to speak with a farmer but still need to raise enough money just to make this trip. Even then, there is no guarantee this mission will secure us with a AE to work with.

Vanuatu Government should have conducted its due diligence on market availability prior to advertising and granting new licenses of some new 80 agents - this is an over-kill; and many of us would not be able to secure any market/business. Instead of agents hunting for individual markets in Australia and NZ; Governments of Vanuatu should dialogue with NZ and Australia to ascertain how many more people the market requires, and identify the farms/middlemen engaged in recruiting.

Supply (of workers from Vanuatu) far exceeds demand (in Australia). Need to be able to access more approved employers (AEs) in Australia. Either we need to do a bit more strategic marketing from our side, or the Australian Government needs to do a lot more in promoting the SWP to potential AEs.

There's insufficient AEs who are farmers. The involvement of Contractors/Labour Hire Companies has been a very problematic one in recent months, even with contractors that are supposed to be 'reputable' ... which attracted a lot of criticisms in the media in recent months leading up to an out-of-court settlement with a number of very poorly paid Vanuatu workers.

My main challenge is I have not identified any employers or contractors yet in Australia to work with. Personally, it was quite easy when I started as a Direct Recruiter for RSE in NZ in 2008. Simply, I had friends in NZ who introduced me to the program.. This time with SWP, I have tried to contact farms and labour hire companies via email to verify if anyone is keen to recruit from Vanuatu then I can make appointments to go out to meet them or we can talk further via emails but have not been successful.

We need to have meetings to be familiar with how Aussie Farmers and Contractors work and learn about how we can approach farmers. I believe as agents, we must have the right intentions, motives and principles to work with. but will need to have knowledgeable, accountable, honest staff to work with at ESU. We need officers with no double standards and no conflict of interests. but those who are willing to share information and have the calibre to train agents. We need officers who can offer appropriate and relevant advice.

We haven't recruited any workers yet to New Zealand since the day we had our license till today. The problem we are facing in recruiting workers is because we haven't find any farmers yet in New Zealand. Even we tried to contact them through email but could not get any respond from them. So we would like to ask if you could help us to find some farmers or contractors in New Zealand and help us contact with them. We are asking if there are any information on how to find farmers please let us know. If it would cost one of us to travel to New Zealand then we are ready to go but we need information.

2. Problems on how the recruitment process works

When 2 or more agents use the same approved employer. A lot of influence from workers that are not trained well from different agents can miss lead those that are trained to be hardworking and we'll behaved

The difficulties faced or experienced during recruitment are, printing of passport taking too if we identify good workers. for example, the rural people don't have the money already and to pay 15,000 VT for the passport was too much, there are other requirements to pay as medical examination and police clearance, taking a week that is too long if we are required to summit documents in time from visa ls and contracts.

There's just this one thing that I find it hard and confusing to work on it, its the Departing Australian Superannuation Payment (DASP)..some of the boys have returned and wanted to claim for their super but unfortunately,I can't do it coz I've never done it before..so its something that I really need help with it

Because I have recruited workers from the scattered islands of Vanuatu, it is difficult in getting them to Port Vila on time to do paper works and in addition i have workers who have registered and are still awaiting to find placements for them for both New Zealand and Australia. I have to keep them in camps and train them in all sorts of areas before their departure that includes working as a Team no matter what island they originate from, personal hygiene including how to use a proper flashing toilet and shower. How to prepare a healthy meal and etc... It is a pre training for them . It is costing me money to keep them in camps but i know it works when they get to NZ or Aussie and i have received positive feedback from employers in Australia.

The different in-country processes involved in getting a worker across to Australia is also an obstacle for our workers in my personally opinion. For instance, to apply for a police clearance, one has to rotate between 3 offices to meet the requirement. A one stop shop for offices such as the police, civil status, clinic would be very helpful.

Sourcing workers from the islands is also an obstacle for us and the workers themselves as most of the essential services are in the urban centres.

In addition, choosing the right workers is also a recruitment risk. Often we prefer to send workers that we know of their background so that they don't end up breaking the rules. Recently, I have created our Code of Conduct and since August workers have been signing it before they leave. It gives me comfort when I select people I don't really know as it provides for disciplinary action.

More supervision of the scheme is necessary in my view by the ESU and individual agents to safe guard it and ensure it continues to grow into the future. We must set up a compliance regime to safe guard the scheme.

The only problem we have is our workers have to travel from their island to another island to prepare their medical checks and police clearance . This can slow down the process .

Its difficult to identify or choose a good and brave team leader.

Banned workers who love to cause problems.

Our difficulties are Finances and documentation while applicants do not have sufficient cash to meet his or her own cost. In our case we have an office and a secretary who tries to assist the interested workers. Since we sent three lots of workers our capital run out, that is our difficulty we face as an agent.

It was difficult at the beginning to fill up the immi.account but once am in, the rest has been easy.

First recruitment - we were left with a short amount of time to prepare for the departure. Second recruitment had a wider time frame. However technical issues with VCH Xray machine caused major delays.

What suggestions do you have to make the recruitment process work better?

No real suggestions other than giving us options when vital equipment fails to proceed with medicals etc

Some challenges faced when recruiting workers are as follows:

1. Some workers speak and understand little or no English at all although they are very good and hard working people
2. Good workers are rejected by contractors/approved employers because of their age. Although Vanuatu people can still do heavy manual labour up to the age of 60.
3. It's risky to recruit people who are not known by the agent because if they really want to go to on seasonal work employment, they can put on their best behaviour when meeting the agent but once out of sight or in the field, their attitudes can change.

For example, I had a thorough briefing with the recent workers and one of the things I told them was that, if anytime they were sick or would not be going to work, to call their supervisor/farmer or contractor and inform them. Last week, I had a call from the contractor that one of the boys was sick for two days but decided to stay home without letting the farmer or contractor know. This is not good behaviour or attitude at all which, I think, does not reflect well on the agent, as a recruiter.

Concerning recruitment of workers, I have found that our Vanuatu workers are good workers but their only problem is that most of them, once we have put them through pre-departure briefing with the Labour Department and they are told not to drink while working in Australia, they go ahead and do it. The farmer will want them the following year because of their good work but the drinking will continue.

Worker attitude is quite a major issue. We need to be able to screen workers better and pick out the good guys with good work ethics and leave out the bad apples. We need to better detect bad and problematic workers so we can screen them out and not send them to Australia. A lot of agents face that issue today in Vanuatu and across the Pacific. How we can more effectively screen workers is a very big challenge today not just with us but with other agents as well.

We need proper training for team leadership - especially how they handle difficult and sensitive issues with workers as and when such challenges arise while the workers are away in Australia.

Vanuatu Government should also display prudence in employee recruitment - those that have been terminated in NZ are enabled to apply for employment in Australia or vice-versa. The system is not well documented and established to get rid of bad employees and bad employers (farmers and bad agents in Vanuatu). Currently there is no such a system that removes a bad agent for failing to comply with standing rules.

When the contractors require urgent recruitment, say in less than in 2 weeks. It makes it difficult to prepare the workers in a very short period of time. It quite difficult to recruit workers from the isolated islands. ... It is very expensive and remote for communication. Thus, we had to advise them to come to Santo to do all their preparation. The length of processing NZ visa for a month is too lengthy.

The contractors need to give me notice at list 2 months before recruitment. The NZ visa process should only be 3 days. The visa office should be in Vanuatu rather in Fiji. The contractors should assist with the process of recruiting here in Vanuatu and especially the administration costs.

The contractor I am working with does not provided the workers payslips in time. Sometimes the workers do not see their payslip for over a month. The workers do not understand their deduction from their pay. The contractor need to explain the deductions. The contractor do not follow the contract signed with the worker. The workers were paid a different rate to what they originally sign with the contractor.

3. Lack of finance to carry out the role of agent

Need finance to facilitate this program well.

Unsustainability of the business model of expecting Growers to pay for the services we provide (MOU is not aligned to business principles)

We Can't afford meeting all our expenses. photo copy, internet, électricity etc..If thé Department can approve some certain amount of charges to workers to meet this cost and keep administration work functioning.

I believe there is a need to make some adjustments to the current arrangements to benefit the agents as well. At the moment agents are sacrificing their money and effort without much return of investment.

I noticed that agents are getting very little for each worker they send. How about the two governments agree on a prescribed fee like AUD200.00 per worker sent payable by the employ to the agent?

The difficulties I have experienced during my recruiting process is the cost involved in carrying out the arrangement given my duty as an Agency without being provided financial support. I suggest in order to provide a better process and to make the recruitment become better and helpful for the Agency, is that the government must provide financial support,or the agency must charge a consultancy fee for the service provided.

We are only a small scale agency, so it is not easy. In order to sustain our operations, often we must sacrifice our own money to meet costs.

Most of us were not happy about the payment we receive from the other end but we have to accept in the end as it is our first time to sent labourers. I would suggest that payments be made before the departure of our men. I would also want the Australian government to put a fix price for one Vanuatu labourers to go to the agents as the agents are always the one doing all the works for each labourers as many of us don't have a car to move around preparing documents.

We must have a business license, registered and approved by the Government. However we are not in any expected to take commission on workers sent to Australia under the program. Although there is recognition that workers come back and ... give a little when coming back to their agents. This ranges from 3-10% from what we've heard.

Difficulty - financing internet, calls, transportation, time spend etc. Solve problem - charge

service and processing fee.

... I just spent over VT 1m visiting a recruitment agency in Adelaide as well as other contacts in Melbourne, Sydney and the workers recruited through Top of the Crops in Brisbane. First visit to Australia was in April this week for a week as part of my attempt to meet and talk to any farmers who is willing to work with me as a licensed agent.

4. Proposals for reform

Vanuatu government licensing of too many new entrants into the business of trying to send workers to Australia.

Our suggestion is for Vanuatu to follow the Agent Model but cull the number of Licensees only to those already working.

That the Licensees be allowed to collect a fee payable after successful placement from returned workers.

That the contribution by growers towards transport of \$500.00 per person be stopped.

That Joint ATRs be allowed in Australia.

That a program be started in Vanuatu to train towards Driver's Licensees, Forklift Tickets and Team Leadership!!!

That the VNPF be recipient of all Superannuation after successful placement.

My suggestion to make the recruitment process work better are as follows:

1. Undertake different trainings such as financial literacy (includes budget), OHS (occupation, health and safety in the workplaces), tithing (religious), physical exercises, awareness from experienced workers either from NZ or Australia. My last point is very important because social issues are also addressed here.
2. References from individual must come from their own community and not another community as well as reference from the family or spouse. Also very important.
3. To be able to select an individual worker, my recommendation to all agents is to know the worker well and fully, find out about his/her background.
4. Any worker from NZ should not be recruited in Australia or vice versa because of the limited opportunities and also, there could be reasons why their current recruitment has been ceased.

I suggest we should have a office desk in Canberra office to help facilitate or do marketing on behalf of the local agents in Vanuatu. We feel that we have not being marketed properly on ground Australia and we need our Labour Department with the network with Australian Mobility to find as much farmers for us in Australia. We know that there are alot of farmers in Australia and need eligible workers but we have limited resources to assist so if we have an office desk in the high commission in Canberra with the support with of Australian Government in Vanuatu to negotiate to place an office in Canberra mainly to help find farmers or do negotiations or marketing on our behalf it would be one of the resolution to solve our problem.

I suggest that the Vanuatu and Australian governments find ways to connect new agents with either employers or farmers. There is currently a missing link. How about the Australian Farmers Association reps come to Vanuatu and meet with Agents to discuss possibilities?

Because I have recruited workers from the scattered islands of Vanuatu, it is difficult in getting them to Port Vila on time to do paper works and in addition I have workers who have registered and are still awaiting to find placements for them for both New Zealand and Australia. I have to keep them in camps and train them in all sorts of areas before their departure that includes working as a Team no matter what island they originate from, personal hygiene including how to use a proper flushing toilet and shower. How to prepare a healthy meal and etc... It is a pre training for them . It is costing me money to keep them in camps but i know it works when they get to NZ or Aussie and i have received positive feedback from employers in Australia.

What suggestions do you have to make the recruitment process work better?

Need to have more staff at ESU (Labour Department to be involved in the compliance side of the scheme). Need more staff to help in proper screening of applications to help the current staff. Need to get the ESU Staff and Agents to go to the islands and make awareness and get involved in the recruitment processes. We need Government's political will to intervene. We need to hire a bigger space to conduct pre-departure briefing and the Government should help in that. More Staff to be able to conduct pre-departure and involve all Government and private sectors to be part of these pre-departures, for example the Banks so they can provide better rates in terms of remittances and VNPF in terms of saving their money for future investments. Also the Training providers in terms of reintegration programs in setting businesses etc when they are not returning in the Scheme in the future.

What suggestions do you have to make the recruitment process work better?

- (i) Stop direct recruitment by the farmers
- (ii) Allow only agents to send workers to farmers or Approved Employer

Relax the criteria and requirements for Private individuals or company in Australia to apply for Approved Employer License.

My Suggestion is the Australian government should be flexible of approving SWP employer back in Australia plus our local labour department agent helping out in the engagement of workers

Amend the Seasonal Employment Act 2007 which would rather give more enlightenment to the recruitment process and setting up of a disciplinary Commission and set up a legal framework system for to be responsible for the enquiry into workers allegations, terms of working conditions and other related disciplinary issues.

One of my suggestions to make the recruitment work better is that we as agents need to draft a written agreement with our workers that come through us to work in Australia and they need to sign it if they agree with all of it, especially the ones governing their moral behaviour. If they breach the contract then we will automatically stop them not going back and have them replaced.

Assistance must be given by both Governments (Australia & Vanuatu) to employers and labour agencies. We propose a joint Government organisation of forums & seminars in

Australia/Vanuatu where the two parties (potential ones also) can meet specifically for the SWP program. The Australian Government with all its resources have left this to the farm associations and fund only a few agents from Vanuatu to go...a lot of the ones that attend already have employers based in Australia and this is very frustrating considering that the ones that should be attending are Vanuatu agents that still do not have Employers!

It takes forever to get approvals from Canberra for new Employers in the SWP program. We new agents have a few agents who have their applications pending (now going towards 2 years!).....(It seems there is no excuse now to the delays but that the current Australian Government is seen as not favouring the SWP program).

- Cut the red tape to approving Employers!
- It appears that the Australian Gov is not consulting with farmers at all in Australia about the SWP! Most farms are interested due to the productivity (in general) that labourers from the SWP in particular have had (Vanuatu in particular).
- A new unit must be working full time in Australia to make sure farmers are fulfilling their contracts (especially on wages....) ...
- Make use of technology platforms to get workers, farmers and authorities in collaborating together for a better outcome. We are taking too long to address issues. Both Australian farmers and Vanuatu Workers have benefited from the program but the Authorities on both sides have not kept up with issues in addressing them promptly. This causes a lot of resources (from experience).

3) What suggestions do you have to make the recruitment process work better?

Ans: Can Authorities concerned in Australia make more awareness about this and the requirements and responsibilities that go with this. It seems to me that farmers are just put off by what they see in black and white that discourages them before they start. There must be fair dealing from big businesses and individual or small farmers. Big businesses seem to control everything and the current systems in place in Australia will suit them which to me is what is currently happening. And authorities need to understand the differences in the systems used in all PICs involved in the Programs so that mechanisms put in place are compatible to the different contexts.

I believe the RSE Program has changed since it's inception therefore SWP should be learning from this and make room for changes just as Immigration and Labour Laws continue to change according to developments around the Globe. As you are dealing with Agents in Vanuatu, it will be a different context from other countries and what I have observed is that current practices will favour only those who have been involved in the Programs for some time now and not in line with Government of Vanuatu coming with this "Equal Opportunity for everyone to be part of these Programs.

Worker attitude is quite a major issue. We need to be able to screen workers better and pick out the good guys with good work ethics and leave out the bad apples. We need to better detect bad and problematic workers so we can screen them out and not send them to Australia. A lot of agents face that issue today in Vanuatu and across the Pacific. How we can more effectively screen workers is a very big challenge today not just with us but with other agents as well.

We need proper training for team leadership - especially how they handle difficult and sensitive issues with workers as and when such challenges arise while the workers are away in Australia. Training to be provided by Australian agencies involved in the SWP to agents in Vanuatu on how to better screen workers for farm work in Australia.

5. Good practice

I have not experienced any difficulties with any of my workers because I call them (team leaders once every week) to update on their progress both work and how they are doing during the weekends.

I do not object in recruiting other islanders but I prefer recruiting my people from the Banks and Torres group. Other islanders have more advantage as they have people who are agents. Plus we want to bring the experience back to our villages so our standard of living may be somehow be like those of the other islands.

we have more than enough people on our training program (around 300) and we conduct training every Saturday and Sunday morning in readiness for placements and opportunities. we want to offer more comprehensive training if funding was available, as we do not charge workers for our support or services.

Recently, I have created our Code of Conduct and since August workers have been signing it before they leave. It gives me comfort when I select people I don't really know as it provides for disciplinary action.

Training to be provided by Australian agencies involved in the SWP to agents in Vanuatu on how to better screen workers for farm work in Australia.

Make it mandatory that approved employers must pay its Vanuatu agents. This is can be implemented by having an additional contract between the Employer (Australia) and Agent (Vanuatu). This must be sited by both Australian & Vanuatu relevant agencies for verification before workers are approved to leave the country. There must be a maximum commission % set at least!.....5% would still be great!