

Julie Bishop promoting the Seasonal Worker Program

Author : Jesse Doyle

Date : March 5, 2014

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, has long been a backer of the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP). Both in Opposition and Government, she has touted the scheme as a private-sector driven development initiative worthy of expansion. During ministerial visits throughout the Pacific last month, Bishop used the scheme to highlight Australia's links with the region.

Her long awaited talks with Fijian PM Frank Bainimarama saw Bishop hint at Fiji's inclusion in the SWP. In a [post-meeting interview](#) with FBC News, Bishop had this to say:

"We want to engage more deeply across a whole range of areas including trade and investment areas, military and defence and the people-to-people links, through a seasonal workers program, through student exchanges and the like."

This would come as [welcome news to the large Fijian community in Australia](#), who have questioned the Australian Government's exclusion of Fijian workers – especially given it came about as a result of a military coup that was out of their control. Whilst no timeframe has been laid out for Fiji's inclusion, it is likely to be finalised in the lead up to this year's election as sanctions are progressively eased.

During an [address to the Lae Chamber of Commerce](#), Bishop also called upon Papua New Guinea to lift its game in the SWP:

"For some reason, it doesn't seem to be taken up with great enthusiasm in Papua New Guinea. For example, the Tongan Government has sent 1200 seasonal workers to Australia in the last 12 months. Papua New Guinea has sent 26—I think we can do better than that."

Interestingly, the Minister also touched on the backpackers' scheme which is now (almost) available to PNG. Here the news is even worse:

"There's also a program we announced for working holidays. We have a visa category for working holiday visas. There are 100 places available but so far I think the paperwork is bogged down and we haven't been able to get these visas out to the young people who would love the opportunity, I am sure, to come to Australia. So there is another plug for the Working Holiday visas."

The working holiday visa agreement with PNG was signed on 12 October 2011, but, according to the June 2013 [Working Holiday report](#), is not yet in effect.