

New village-wide punishment for seasonal worker schemes divides Samoa

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A new measure aimed at preventing “disorderly behaviour” from Samoan workers participating in the Australian and New Zealand seasonal worker schemes has split the small Pacific Island nation.

Samoa Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, [recently announced the policy](#), which excludes entire villages from the schemes if individual villagers misbehave whilst abroad.

The punishment involves Samoan villages being blacklisted for a period of two to four years. According to one source, there are [already six villages on the list](#). The move comes on the back of isolated instances in New Zealand and/or Australia of company vehicles being damaged, drunkenness and theft involving Samoan workers. Two cases of sexual assault have also been reported.

The country’s flagship newspaper The Samoa Observer ran [an editorial on Wednesday](#) condemning the announcement. “While we agree that the Government must come down harder on bad behaviour for the sake of making sure the schemes are not jeopardised, punishing an entire village for the sin of an individual is not just harsh, it’s ridiculous.”

Meanwhile, Samoan community leader and New Zealand MP Su’a William Sio came out in support of the PM in [an interview with Radio Australia](#) on Friday. “I understand where the Prime Minister is coming from because they’ve put quite a lot of effort into negotiating the RSE [Recognised Seasonal Employer] and SWP [Seasonal Worker Program] schemes... and there has been some occasions where one or two have caused problems and brought a bad light on the name of the Samoan workforce.”

The controversial measure is likely to be further discussed at the Pacific Islands Labour Sending Forum, which is being hosted by Samoa in late October.