



MEDIA RELEASE

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FWO ADMITS CONCERN WITH 20% OF 457 VISA EXPLOITATION

In today's Senate Estimates, the Fair Work Ombudsman admitted that there are concerns with between 17-20 per cent of all 457 Visas it has monitored since Labor provided it the power to do so.

The Fair Work Ombudsman, Ms Natalie James said in Senate Estimates today that in the past financial year, there were concerns raised in relation to the nominated position or nominated salary from 302 out of 1,496 Visas, which equates to 20 per cent.

"Of the 1496 we've found concerns on their face with 302. What that means is based on the preliminary enquiries that we've made we have concerns that either the nominated position or the nominated salary aren't in accordance with the visa."

Natalie James, Senate Estimates, 2 June 2015

"So what's the percentage?"

Senator Doug Cameron, Senate Estimates, 2 June 2015

"It's about one in five, it's about 20 per cent."

Natalie James, Senate Estimates, 2 June 2015

In the 2013/14 financial year, there were concerns raised in 18 per cent of the Visas monitored – 1,902 Visas were monitored and concerns were raised with 338.

This large data set confirms Visa exploitation concerns have been consistent over a longer period of time than the most recent media reports.

This news follows and expands on last week's FWO report that indicated 18 per cent of visa holders from a random group of 175 employers have experience employment issues such as underpayment.

Labor calls on the Government to strengthen the 457 visa safeguards it has deliberately relaxed to make it easier for companies to hire overseas workers.

The Abbott Government's softening of visa laws has seen a rise in employment issues for overseas workers, raising concerns about the current 457 Visa laws.

In 2013 Labor strengthened 457 Visa laws, which ensured among other things that employers had to look local first before hiring temporary overseas workers.

Given the Abbott Government's insistence to loosen the scheme, Labor established a Senate Committee to inquire into matters such as the misuse of 457 Visas, which the Government also opposed.

The results of the FWO report show why the Abbott Government should not have opposed the Inquiry and why it should not remove Labor's important safeguards for workers, including loosening English proficiency requirements.

Australia's work visa program must operate with an assurance to the community that robust safeguards are in place to protect all workers. It must not be used as a back door avenue to source cheap labour.

Australian unemployment is at unacceptably high levels and the Budget forecasts unemployment to rise further to 6.5 per cent, the highest in 14 years.

The 457 skilled migrant visa program should not to be a default to replace Australian jobs.

Now is not the time for the Government to loosen up the scheme so business can more easily bring in workers from overseas rather than training and investing in job seekers here.

Only Labor has had a consistent approach to implementing effective and tough 457 Visa laws, and by strengthening the FWO to conduct random inspections of Australian workplaces.

Labor welcomes regular updates by the FWO on its monitoring of 457 visa holders and the referrals to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

We cannot have people working in this country and being denied proper employment protections.

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