



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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**For Immediate Release**

### **MITEZ calls for regional workforce certainty in working holiday visa changes**

MITEZ is calling on the Federal Government to consult regional councils and employers before implementing proposed changes to the Working Holiday Maker program, warning that uncertainty around visa extensions could weaken incentives to work in regional communities.

The proposed ballot system for second- and third-year visas would retain qualifying regional work requirements while limiting the number of applicants able to extend their stay.

MITEZ CEO Maria James said the implications for agriculture, tourism and hospitality across the Mount Isa to Townsville corridor needed to be considered before the changes took effect.

"For a small regional business, being able to recruit and retain a handful of workers can make a significant difference to its capacity to operate," Ms James said.

"Employers invest time in recruiting, accommodating and training people. They need confidence that visa settings will continue encouraging travellers to spend time working in our communities."

Ms James said retaining a regional work requirement did not, by itself, ensure the incentive remained effective.

"If completing the required work only provides entry into a ballot, we need to understand whether travellers will still make the same commitment to regional Australia," she said.

"The opportunity to stay longer is part of what encourages people to travel inland, take up regional work and develop connections with communities they might otherwise never visit."

MITEZ is calling for consultation with affected councils and industries, an assessment of regional workforce impacts, and clear transitional arrangements for workers and employers already making plans under existing settings.

It is also advocating for a dependable pathway for eligible applicants who complete verified regional work, supported by timely visa processing.

Ms James said policy should recognise the additional recruitment challenges facing smaller rural and remote communities while maintaining access to workers across North and North West Queensland.

“We should be looking at practical ways to make inland placements more attractive, including accommodation, transport and stronger incentives to spend time in smaller communities,” she said.

“Our corridor connects rural communities with regional service centres. Workforce settings need to support that whole network.”

The implications extend to the visitor economy along Overlanders Way, where accommodation, food and tourism businesses help sustain both local services and the experience of people travelling through the region.

“Working Holiday Makers contribute as workers, visitors and customers. Their time in our communities can create lasting connections and encourage others to visit,” Ms James said.

“Fair pay, safe workplaces and appropriate accommodation must remain central to the program.”

MITEZ is seeking an approach that recognises the program’s cultural exchange purpose alongside the practical contribution it makes to regional economies.

“Regional councils and employers need a meaningful voice in these changes,” Ms James said.

“We want a program that gives travellers a reason to choose our communities and gives businesses confidence to plan, invest and keep serving their towns.”

## **ENDS**

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