

## Submission to the Minister of Immigration

**Re: Proposed Changes to Immigration Instructions Announced 18 April 2017**

I am a lawyer in private practice in the provincial centre of Whanganui. Immigration work has been a part of my practice for nearly thirty years. I enjoy the people I deal with for their enthusiasm, their positivity about New Zealand as a great place to live, their commitment to leaving a better place for the children they may have themselves and for the great contributions they make to our country.

Because my office is a general provincial practice I handle most of the various types of immigration situations apart from refugee claims. As part of the work requirement I also deal with the New Zealand side: the partner, the employer, and the community support groups. I consider I have a good knowledge of the philosophy and practices of Immigration gained from personal interest and from twenty-eight years working in the field.

I do not take issue with the intentions behind the Minister's recent announcements. I think some are well overdue. I would, however, like the Minister to allow some adjustments that I think would achieve very positive results for provincial areas without generating adverse outcomes for the changes covered in the announcement.

The adjustments I would like to see are:

- 1) Extend the special provision providing a pathway to residence for some specific groups of people in the South Island to also be available for people in a similar situation in the North Island.
- 2) Allow regional median incomes rather than one-size-fits-all national median income to be used in the determination of low-skilled/skilled/high skilled categories.

I expand as follows.

1. Extend special South Island provisions to provincial North Island areas

The situation of long-term work visa holders with no pathway to residence but who are needed as workers is not confined to the South Island.

I have been involved for over a decade with workers in the meat industry who provide halal services: slaughter men, checkers, auditors, supervisors. They fill an essential gap in the industry that has consistently been unable to be met from within New Zealand. Some have been in New Zealand for more than 15 years. There is prospect of a person doing an halal audit role possibly being able to be treated as a primary produce inspector but, for the rest, they do not meet the ANZSCO criteria. The skilled job is 'butcher' - these workers do not fit within the descriptors so are not regarded as skilled for

residence purposes. Despite this they hold essential skills work visas. Most have families in New Zealand who are well settled. Most will earn more than the median income but not 150% of the median income.

I am aware that there is the same situation in forestry and more recently, the honey industry.

I believe the numbers would not be large and providing such workers in provincial North Island areas with a pathway to residence will have no effect on net migration figures because they are already here as permanent and long-term arrivals. It will not open any floodgate as they will be in niche areas and will not take jobs away from New Zealanders as long term non-availability of New Zealanders is the reason they have continued to be employed.

At my last involvement there were fewer than 200 halal workers who would fit the category and that included halal workers in the South Island. I am confident that North Island workers would have the support of their employers and community to have a pathway to residence.

## 2. Regional variations for median income

Statistics New Zealand provides detailed regular and accurate income information on both a national and local level. There is no problem about establishing the median incomes for the various defined regions (such as Whanganui) into which Statistics NZ breaks down its information.

Whanganui's median income is not \$49,000 but closer to \$40,000. This reflects that Whanganui is not as affluent as other parts of the country such as Auckland, Tauranga and Christchurch. Whanganui incomes may be lower but this is also reflected in lower property prices and lower cost of living.

Employers in this area struggle to attract and retain good quality staff with the necessary skills and qualifications. The local talent pool is quite small with one of the factors being that our young people with good levels of skills, qualifications and experience tend to leave the provinces for the bright lights of the larger centres. This is particularly noticeable with school leavers who leave Whanganui for university and other tertiary study in subjects not offered at our local polytechnic. As a result our local labour pool runs short at levels above semi-skilled.

Allowing regional rather than national medians would let provincial employers in places like Whanganui attract and retain needed staff without creating labour market distortions through trying to fit local conditions into national parameters.

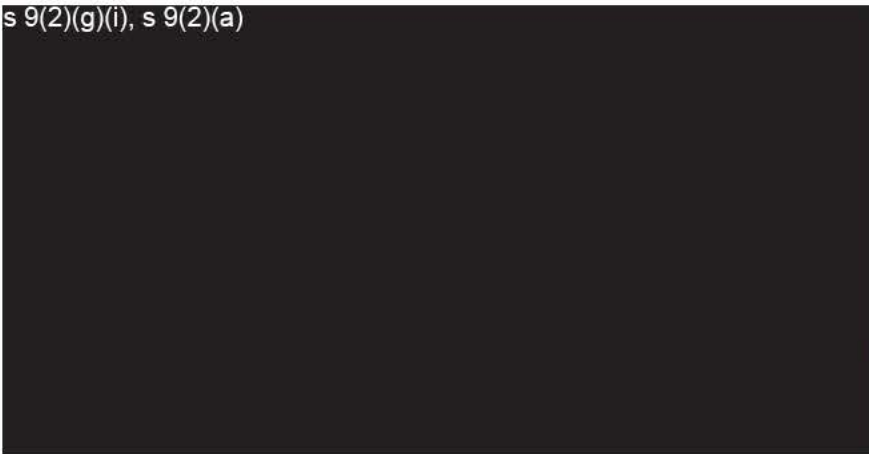
Allowing regional variations would be consistent with other areas of immigration policy which provide incentives for people to move to regions outside Auckland such as the 30 bonus points for non-Auckland jobs or the additional points for business migrants.

Allowing regional income variations could also give provincial areas an advantage in attracting people because they could offer 'skilled migrant' benefits at rates which would be appropriate for the regions but not enough if they were in Auckland or another main high income centre. The employers would of course still need to satisfy the labour market requirements.

The workers would need to remain in the region to retain immigration benefits. The work visa is job and area specific so that would not be an issue. As far as residence is concerned it can be structured so proof of continuing regional residence for say, 4 or 5 years, is a precondition to issuing a permanent resident visa.

Regards

s 9(2)(g)(i), s 9(2)(a)



RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL

FORMATION ACT 1982