



Submission of the New
Zealand Meat Workers
and Related Trades Union
Incorporated

to the

Ministry of Business, Innovation and
Employment

on the

Suite of proposed changes to the Essential
Skills visa – discussion document

P O Box 5543

Papanui

Christchurch 8542

1. Introduction
- 1.1 The NZ Meat Workers and Related Trades Union Incorporated is a Union established pursuant to the provisions of the Employment Relations Act, which represents approximately 23,000 meat industry employees throughout New Zealand.
- 1.2 The New Zealand Meat Workers and Related Trades Union supports the submissions of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.
- 1.3 This Union has the National Office in Christchurch with the Branch Offices in:
 - 1.3.1. Aotearoa Branch – Auckland, Palmerston North and Napier
 - 1.3.2. Canterbury Branch – Christchurch
 - 1.3.3. Otago Southland Branch – Dunedin and Invercargill
 - 1.3.4. Wanganui Branch – Wanganui

NZ Meat Workers Union – MBIE

Seasonal work in the NZ Meat Processing Industry.....

1. There is an overcapacity of meat plants for the number of animals being slaughtered – this is more pronounced in the Sheep & Venison meat processing, and to a lesser extent in the Beef & Calf meat processing.
2. This overcapacity creates significant weekly pay fluctuations and influences a worker's family's final yearly income.
3. The NZ Meat Industry may create a perception that a typical meat worker earns
 - \$24 per hour x 40 hours per week x 26 weeks = \$24,960 p.a. or

- \$24 x 50 (overtime) x 45 weeks = \$54,000 p.a.
4. If this was the case then there would be no requirement for immigrants because NZ'ers would be lining up at the gate of every meat processing plant seeking full time seasonal employment.

The reality.....

5. Meat workers would be very fortunate if the above was factual.
6. Invariably many meat worker families are living on hourly rates less than \$24 per hour (unless they are high skilled Boners & slaughtermen), they do not consistently receive 35 hours per week some receive less than 16 hours per week.
7. The length of season fluctuates widely around the North & South Island.
8. Another dimension that has had a dramatic impact on the working lives of meat workers is shift work.
9. What further reduces the earnings of meat workers is two shifts running simultaneously (this is starkly apparent in AFFCO meat processing plants) at a meat plant and the stock that is coming in for slaughter/processing is spread over the two shifts. For example - if a day's work is available this gives two half days' income for the two shifts of workers. This has become the norm in many meat processing plants since 1991.
10. The meat companies argue that if they terminate a shift they are likely to lose that shift of workers. This perpetuates the precarious nature of seasonal employment in the NZ Meat Industry.

Immigration approvals - discrimination

11. NZMWU has had complaints from many of its membership all over NZ about overseas workers being offered 12 month seasons whilst NZ'ers (many years of service to that employer) receive employment from a couple of months to 11 months. These employers create work in and around the meat plant for

immigrants whilst long term loyal employees who return each season are terminated at the end of each season.

12. In some cases, during the current season NZ'ers can be terminated two or three times during that same season. Whilst immigrants are carried over and above the manning of the meat plant.
13. We have asked our plant union representatives to do surveys of "Why meat workers are leaving". Many meat workers are leaving because of the unreliability of ongoing full weeks earnings and the short season durations compared to earlier seasons.

We believe obviously that the NZ meat industry employers should value their NZ employees first and give them a more guarantee of earnings – similar to the Fonterra model of pay structure. This would attract employees back to the meat processing industry.

"Essential Skills visas for seasonal work are only granted for the length of the season and that the offer of employment must match the length of the season"

1. otherwise as stated above discrimination becomes more apparent.
2. This also causes racial disharmony at the meat plants.
3. Further this drops the skill base and is only a short-term fix, when the meat industry should be pumping more money into the current lack of training that is prevalent and pervades the meat industry.

Are there any seasonal occupations that should be added or removed from this list?

The meat industry should not be added to the list.

What are the occupations of the seasonal staff that you are commenting on?

These submissions focus on all classes of employees in the meat plant – i.e. Fellmongery, de-boning, slaughtering, meat processing, stockyards, cooling floors and freezers.

For each of the occupations that you have identified, what is the typical period that you require seasonal staff to cover (e.g the peak of the season)?

1. Invariably today it is very difficult to define the "peak of the season" in the NZ Meat Industry.
2. In a drought then a peak can be measured by the amount of grass disappearing of the farms and stock floods into the plants in the immediate province/region. This again varies from year to year.
3. Some seasons have not peaked as stock has been slaughtered over a long season with no peak. As the farmer has plenty of grass for a longer period and can cull off when the land starts to get colder.

4. More importantly some farmers hold onto their stock longer as the animal will grow larger and heavier and the farmer receives larger returns in most cases.

We support the written submissions of the NZCTU, these submissions are in addition to those.

Due to time constraints these submissions are brief - we would be happy to appear before MBIE and give additional information from around NZ on the nature of this industry.

s 9(2)(g)(i)

National Secretary

NZ Meat Workers Union