

Submission  
No 37

**INQUIRY INTO MODERN SLAVERY RISKS FACED BY  
TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND  
REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council

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# SUBMISSION ON ADDRESSING MODERN SLAVERY RISKS FACED BY TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL NEW SOUTH WALES BY ALBURY WODONGA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

## Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council

Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council (AWECC) is the peak multicultural organisation for the Albury, NSW border region and Wodonga, Victoria. AWECC is committed to empowering residents from diverse cultural backgrounds to achieve their highest potential in all aspects of life. As the voice for the Border ethnic communities, AWECC advocates for the interest of the multicultural community members. AWECC focuses on promoting equitable access and participation for people of all cultural heritage while encouraging respect and harmony in our community. Temporary migrants are part of the cohort that we support.

## Introduction

Temporary migrant workers in rural New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria play a vital role in sustaining agricultural, industries, and regional economies. However, their temporary status, isolation, and sole reliance on employers or recruitment agents expose them to heightened risks of modern slavery, including forced labour, debt bondage, and exploitation. These vulnerabilities are compounded by language barriers, limited awareness of rights, and inadequate access to support services, cultural attitudes that revere authority and seek to avoid disagreement.

This submission outlines key risks faced by these workers and proposes actionable recommendations that could be considered to mitigate exploitation of the migrant workers and to promote their wellbeing. Also, we are aware that the Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner has identified some of these risks.

## Modern Slavery Risks in Rural NSW

### **1. Debt Bondage and Recruitment Exploitation**

Many migrant workers incur significant debts to recruitment agents in their home countries, creating financial dependency that binds them to exploitative work conditions. Agents often fail to disclose full terms of employment or exaggerate earning potential.

### **2. Isolation and Limited Oversight**

Rural settings reduce visibility of worker conditions, limiting access to regulatory bodies, unions, or community support, and increasing the risk of undetected exploitation.

### **3. Wage Theft and Underpayment**

Temporary migrant workers frequently face withheld wages, underpayment, or deductions for accommodation and transport, often below legal standards.

### **4. Restricted Access to Healthcare**

Uncertainty around medical entitlements leaves workers vulnerable to untreated injuries or illnesses, exacerbated by fear of retaliation if they seek help.

## **5. Lack of Awareness of Rights**

Language barriers and insufficient pre- and post-arrival education mean many workers are unaware of their legal protections under Australian law, such as minimum wage, working hours, or complaint mechanisms.

### **Recommendations**

To address these risks and uphold Australia's commitment to combatting modern slavery, the following measures are recommended:

#### **a) Support for Multicultural Organizations**

Strengthen funding and resources for multicultural organisations operating in rural NSW to provide tailored support to temporary migrant workers. These organisations can offer culturally sensitive services, including legal advice, language assistance, and community integration programs. Establishing regular outreach initiatives in rural areas will ensure workers have access to trusted advocates who understand their cultural and linguistic needs.

#### **b) Obligation for Agents to Provide Rights Information**

Implement a regulated system requiring recruitment agents—both in Australia and overseas—to provide workers with clear, translated, and standardised information about their rights before departure. This should include details on minimum wage, working conditions, contract terms, and avenues for reporting exploitation. Compliance could be enforced through licensing requirements and penalties for non-compliance.

#### **c) Post-Arrival Briefings by Independent Advocacy Organizations**

Mandate independent, government-funded advocacy organisations to deliver in-person briefings for temporary migrant workers upon arrival in rural NSW. These sessions should cover workplace rights, safety standards, healthcare access, and confidential reporting mechanisms for abuses. Delivered in workers' native languages, these briefings would empower workers to recognise and resist exploitation from the outset.

#### **d) System Review of Medical Entitlements**

Conduct a comprehensive review of temporary migrant workers' access to medical entitlements under current visa schemes. This review should assess gaps in coverage, clarity of eligibility, and barriers to accessing care (e.g., cost, language, or employer interference). Outcomes should inform policy reforms to ensure all workers have equitable access to healthcare, including mental health support, without fear of reprisal.

#### **e) Strengthened Monitoring and Enforcement**

Increase labour inspections in rural NSW by collaborating with the Fair Work Ombudsman and anti-slavery units to proactively identify and address exploitation. Mobile inspection teams could target high-risk industries like agriculture and horticulture.

**f) *Worker-Driven Reporting Channels***

Establish anonymous, multilingual hotlines or digital platforms for workers to report abuses directly to authorities or community advocacy organisations, bypassing employers, or agents.

**g) *Employer Accountability Framework***

Introduce mandatory training for employers of temporary migrant workers on modern slavery laws and ethical recruitment practices, with penalties for non-compliance tied to visa sponsorship eligibility.

**h) *Community Integration Programs***

Fund local councils and NGOs to create social inclusion initiatives, reducing isolation and fostering connections between migrant workers and rural communities.

## Conclusion

Temporary migrant workers in rural NSW face systemic vulnerabilities that heighten their risk of modern slavery. By bolstering support systems, enhancing transparency, and ensuring access to rights and services, the NSW and other state and territory governments can protect these workers and align with national and international anti-slavery commitments. We urge the committee to consider and recommend adopting these recommendations as part of a holistic strategy to safeguard migrant workers and uphold human dignity in rural economies. The learnings from NSW could inform other states on how to protect migrant workers from exploitation.

Contact:

Should you require any further information or clarification, please get in touch with our CEO Richard Ogetii at