

Hon Iain Lees-Galloway

Minister of Immigration



PĀNUI PĀPĀHO
MEDIA STATEMENT

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Supporting stranded seasonal workers to keep working with more flexible options

Recognised Seasonal Employers and migrant seasonal workers stranded in New Zealand will be able to continue working and supporting themselves with more flexible hours and roles, says Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway.

The time-limited visa changes are:

- Stranded RSE workers will be able to work part-time (a minimum of 15 hours per week) and with no limit on roles that they can do.
- The workers will need to have an employment agreement with an RSE employer, who will need to continue to honour commitments under the RSE scheme.
- Any additional time an RSE worker spends in New Zealand will not count towards the time they would ordinarily have to spend overseas before they can return for seasonal work.

Each year up to 14,400 workers, mainly from Pacific Island nations, arrive in New Zealand to fill seasonal labour shortages in the horticulture and viticulture industries.

“Around 9,000 seasonal workers are still in New Zealand, a number of those stranded with no flights home and no way to support themselves after the harvest season has ended. The Government is supporting Pacific Island governments to repatriate their citizens but many are expected to remain in New Zealand for some time.” said Iain Lees-Galloway.

“RSE visas limit workers to specific work, which is now drying up despite the Government already supporting workers to move to new RSE employers unable to bring in migrant workers as the borders are closed.

“The RSE scheme is part of our special relationship with the Pacific. As a country, we have a responsibility to support these workers and their employers, whose pastoral care responsibilities include accommodation for the workers,”

The responsibility remains with RSE employers to comply with employment law and pastoral care requirements.

“We are facing a rise in unemployment among New Zealanders and we expect more New Zealanders to be available for work next season,” says Iain Lees-Galloway.

“For this reason, the Government has decided to keep the RSE scheme annual cap at 14,400 for the next year. This is not what we originally announced and planned but we anticipate that more New Zealanders will be available to do this work next year so we could not justify another increase of the cap as we originally planned.

“I want to give employers in the horticulture and viticulture industries as much certainty as possible in uncertain times, so I have taken the decision now even though next seasons workers will only be able to enter New Zealand when it is safe to relax border restrictions,” says Iain Lees-Galloway.

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