



## Fair Pay for a Fair Day's Work for People Working Temporarily in Australia

October 2025

*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Luke 6:31

*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.* James 5:4

*It has been the custom hitherto for men to hold us as their own property, which is pitiable enough, considering that Christ has delivered and redeemed us all, without exception, by the shedding of his precious blood, the lowly as well as the great. Accordingly, it is consistent with Scripture that we should be free and should wish to be so.*

From the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants calling for their liberation from exploitation, 1 March 1525

For over a decade, the Uniting Church has advocated for more significant safeguards to prevent the exploitation of people working on Australian farms. People on temporary visas are particularly vulnerable to exploitation across a range of employment sectors that are low-paid, such as horticulture, cleaning and meat processing. Often, labour hire businesses have been used to facilitate the exploitation of people on temporary visas.

Labour hire businesses employ people directly and then provide those workers to other companies, known as the host business. The host business pays the labour hire business for each worker provided.

In places where labour hire businesses are not regulated, host businesses have been able to engage exploitative labour hire businesses, including wage theft. The host business pays a low rate to the labour hire business, which in turn exploits the people it employs. If law enforcement agencies seek to address the exploitation, the owner of the labour hire business often vanishes. They can do so as they frequently use false names, and the workers do not know their real identity. We dealt with cases where the owners of labour hire businesses were run by people using the false names of "Cowboy" and "Max Lion". The host employer would claim ignorance of the wage theft the labour hire business had engaged in and often escaped any penalty.



The current Commonwealth Government promised to implement a national labour hire licensing scheme.

Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and the ACT have implemented labour hire business licensing schemes. The Queensland and Victoria schemes provide the greatest protection for workers. The labour hire business licensing schemes ensure:

- That the identities of the people running the labour hire business are known, so they can be held to account for any exploitation of the employees working for them;
- That the people running the labour hire business are suitable people who do not have a history of worker exploitation or unethical or illegal business behaviour; and,
- The law enforcement agency overseeing the scheme can visit the workplaces where the labour hire business operates.

An essential feature of an effective labour hire business licensing scheme is that a host business can be prosecuted for using an unlicensed labour hire business, which is the case for the existing Victorian and Queensland laws.



### **Example of positive action to address worker exploitation through the Victorian Labour Hire Licensing Scheme**

On 5 June 2025, the Victorian Labour Hire Authority reported the Supreme Court of Victoria imposed penalties of \$255,000 on Cameron Workforce Pty Ltd and two individuals, Linna Chiem and Cameron Morm. The Court found the company had breached the *Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018* (Vic) by providing workers to several farms without a labour hire license. The Court found the workers employed by Cameron Workforce were underpaid, and did not:

- receive superannuation contributions;
- have tax withheld from their pay;
- authorise in writing the \$100 accommodation fee being deducted from their wages;
- have written contracts; and,
- receive payslips.

The Victorian Labour Hire Authority reported that the house where the Cameron Workforce workers were housed had overcrowded bedrooms, with mattresses on the floor and unsafe, outdoor cooking facilities.

While the Commonwealth Government has been willing to move on a national labour hire licensing scheme, the Queensland Government opposes such a national scheme if the Victorian law is used as the model. The Queensland Government has been concerned that the Victorian law failed to prevent criminals from being able to run labour hire businesses in the construction industry in Victoria.

### **What You Can Do**

Write polite and respectful letters to:

#### **The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP**

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

#### **The Hon. Patrick Gorman MP**

Assistant Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Assistant Minister

Points to make in your letters:

- Express concern at the ongoing exploitation of people working for labour hire businesses while on temporary visas.
- Urge that the Government follow through on its promise to provide a robust national labour hire business licensing scheme. It should be based on the scheme already operating in Queensland.
- Point out that by aligning with existing labour hire licensing schemes, it will minimise disruption and effort to convert to a national scheme.
- Note that labour hire licensing schemes in Queensland and Victoria have significantly reduced the exploitation of people working in those states on temporary visas.
- Note that an essential feature of an effective labour hire business licensing scheme is that a host business can be prosecuted for using an unlicensed labour hire business.
- Ask that a prosecution of a host business should not depend on a worker testifying. If a host employer makes payments to a labour hire business, the burden of proof should be on the host business to prove the payments were not for labour hire services.
- Ask that the labour hire business licensing scheme should also regulate accommodation provided by labour hire businesses, as is the case under the existing Queensland and Victorian laws.