



## What are labour demand surveys

### What are labour demand surveys, and how were these surveys used to identify the initial regions for the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme?

The Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (the Pilot) will only operate in areas where there is demonstrated unmet demand for harvest labour.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations regularly undertakes research to establish and quantify the recruitment experiences of employers. The Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences involves a telephone survey of employers using an Australian Government Statistical Clearing House approved survey instrument.

The Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences was adapted to collect information on the recruitment of seasonal workers in the horticulture industry. The survey was designed to identify the difficulties that employers in the horticulture industry are experiencing in filling their seasonal vacancies. This was done by gathering information from employers in nominated regions on the number of seasonal vacancies they usually have, their success in filling these positions, reasons for difficulties in filling seasonal positions, methods of filling seasonal vacancies, quality and skills needed for seasonal work, and future recruitment expectations.

Growers were notified by mail that the survey would be taking place. Trained interviewers then telephoned selected growers and conducted the survey, using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing instrument. The survey took between six and nine minutes.

The main elements of the survey included:

- the business' characteristics, such as crops grown, number of full-time staff and farm size;
- identifying what months seasonal workers were required and the number of positions usually needed;

- whether the business is usually able to fill all their seasonal vacancies;
- whether the business often turns away applicants because all positions are filled;
- the proportion of seasonal workers on a temporary or working holiday visa;
- whether the business hired more, fewer or the same number of seasonal workers in their most recent harvest;
- the methods used to fill seasonal vacancies;
- the criteria used to select seasonal workers;
- the particular positions requiring basic English language skills;
- overall difficulty in filling seasonal vacancies and reasons for difficulty;
- provision of training to seasonal workers;
- methods of payment to seasonal workers;
- whether business provides board and lodging to seasonal workers; and
- whether the business has recruited for permanent workers over the last 12 months.

The surveys were undertaken to provide a source of information about labour demand in addition to information provided by peak industry organisations and local growers.

### **Key findings from the surveys were:**

In the three regions initially surveyed between July and September 2008 (Swan Hill, Griffith and Stanthorpe), over a third of growers surveyed stated that they experienced overall difficulty in filling their seasonal vacancies. In Swan Hill, 34 per cent of growers surveyed reported overall difficulty in filling their seasonal vacancies, compared with 55 per cent and 39 per cent of growers surveyed in Griffith and Stanthorpe respectively. Further survey work undertaken in the Gayndah and Mundubbera region in November/December 2008 indicated that 33 percent of growers surveyed experienced overall difficulty in filling their seasonal vacancies.

High turnover and worker reliability appears to significantly affect the operation of horticulture and fruit enterprises across all three regions. Some growers indicated that it takes around a week for a new picker to reach average productivity, while the average stay for a backpacker working as a picker or a packer was between two weeks and a month. Growers also indicated that seasonal worker reliability was a significant issue and that absenteeism and resigning/leaving without providing notice was also very common.