

3 February 2022

Via Website

To whom it may concern

**SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE INQUIRY INTO MIGRANT EXPLOITATION**

Thank you for the opportunity to present our submission on the Inquiry into Migrant Exploitation.

The Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) supports work by the Education and Workforce Select Committee on its Inquiry into Migrant Exploitation. QLDC has several points of emphasis and recommendation to ensure migrants settle into New Zealand well and their needs are met:

- QLDC is supportive of policy settings and changes made at a central government level to reduce the risk of migrant exploitation.
- Migrant exploitation is a big risk to local communities and local workforces; therefore, key programmes need to be recognised and supported.
- Support and partnership between central government and other invested parties needs to be developed to continue to make positive moves to reduce migrant exploitation.

QLDC recommends that the Education and Workforce Select Committee further considers the impacts of migrant wellbeing and the role of local government, social agencies, and non-governmental organisations in this space as outlined in the attached.

Please note that this submission reflects the position of officers and has not been ratified by full Council.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Theelen  
Chief Executive

## SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE INQUIRY INTO MIGRANT EXPLOITATION

### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Queenstown Lakes District is an essential component of the national tourism economy, responsible for 43.7% of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest export industry<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.2 The district's economy is dominated by the tourism and hospitality sectors, which have historically offered lower than average wages in a place with a higher than average cost of living<sup>2</sup>. Before the pandemic, the average unemployment rate was very low in the district and migrant workers were a necessity for the operation of local businesses<sup>3</sup>.
- 1.3 Queenstown Lakes District is also an area of high growth, with resident numbers growing at a higher rate in comparison to other areas in Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, on a peak day, visitor numbers exceed resident numbers by 134%<sup>5</sup>, illustrating the scale of the challenge in establishing a suitable workforce and the need for migrant workers to supplement locally based staff. Having taken the impact of COVID-19 into account in its projections, beyond the immediate border closures QLDC notes this is likely to remain unchanged over a ten year horizon<sup>6</sup>.
- 1.4 COVID 19 has had a significant negative impact on many aspects of life in the district. In 2020, QLDC advocated extensively for its migrant worker community, many of whom were left suddenly without work and without any means of government support. In the district, there were 5,330 welfare requests received from people on employment or short stay visas<sup>7</sup>. The impact on the economic profile of the district has been profound and many businesses have closed. However, businesses that have remained now struggle to attract New Zealanders into a sector that has been severely affected by uncertainty and border closures<sup>8</sup>.
- 1.5 The QLDC has recently joined the Welcoming Communities scheme established by Immigration New Zealand and will be developing a detailed Welcome Plan for migrants joining its communities. Migrants make up a large proportion of our residential community<sup>9</sup> and QLDC is committed to continuing the development of a community that is diverse, inclusive and supportive.
- 1.6 QLDC strongly supports the inclusion of Te Tiriti principles in the development of new immigration policy. Te Tiriti interest in immigration should be developed in partnership with iwi.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecoprofile.infometrics.co.nz/Queenstown-Lakes%2bDistrict/Tourism/TourismGdp>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ecoprofile.infometrics.co.nz/queenstown-lakes%2bdistrict/PDFProfile>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ecoprofile.infometrics.co.nz/queenstown-lakes%2bdistrict/employment/unemployment> In 2019, Queenstown Lakes had an average unemployment rate of 1.1%,

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/your-council/council-documents/queenstown-lakes-spatial-plan>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/population-and-demand>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/population-and-demand>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/recovery/recovery-intel-report>

<sup>8</sup> <https://jobfix.co.nz/blog/no-quick-fix-for-queenstown-s-labour-market-mess/> For the month of November 2021 there were 891 ads for jobs on a local job site, however many employers (offering higher than market rates) are reporting no applications from New Zealanders.

<sup>9</sup> Current conditions in Queenstown-Lakes Labour Market – December 2021 report. ~3,500 on employer-assisted visas pre-pandemic (15% of filled jobs) and 30% of Queenstown Lakes workers came to New Zealand <5 years ago (2018 census).

## **2.0 QLDC is supportive of policy settings and changes made at a central government level to reduce the risk of migrant exploitation.**

- 2.1 QLDC is supportive of policy settings that in turn can improve opportunities for the districts' international workforce i.e.; ability to change role and employer.
- 2.2 QLDC is also supportive of the introduction of an employer accreditation framework – and would like to ensure there is supporting education and information for employers around how they can meet the new accreditation requirements.
- 2.3 Removing the conditions that tie migrant workers to a specific employer and role type may also alleviate the current labour shortage in the district by allowing flexibility of work arrangements. This could also alleviate migrant stress of being tied to an unsuitable employer and curb the risk of migrant exploitation. Therefore, QLDC strongly recommends the removal of these conditions is swiftly implemented.

## **3.0 Migrant exploitation is a big risk to local communities and local workforces; therefore, key programmes need to be recognised and supported.**

- 3.1 As demonstrated, QLDC's migration profile and workforce needs are different to many other parts of Aotearoa New Zealand. The need for this workforce is not just in the tourism sector but also in agriculture and viticulture, in addition to areas of technical expertise which is hard to recruit for in this district. QLDC recommends that regionally-tailored migration settings are needed to meet the current and future workforce needs of the district. QLDC would welcome the development of a Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) to recognise distinct workforce needs in the collaborative development of a sustainable workforce strategy.
- 3.2 Immigration policy needs to balance the needs of people moving into the country and will not necessarily provide a uniform approach for all. The wellbeing of people moving to New Zealand and specific needs they may have while doing so need to be addressed as not all migrants face the same challenges.
- 3.3 QLDC has signed up to take part in the Welcoming Communities Programme to ensure newcomers/migrants are welcomed, settled and integrated into the community. QLDC would welcome further investment from government to establish stronger settlement services, employer education about diversity and inclusion and effective settlement support. Migrants to the district, together with their children, have become deeply integrated into the Queenstown Lakes District community. Some of these migrants for more than a decade and are making a maor cumulative contribution to the local economy and social and cultural diversity.
- 3.4 The government has taken some initial steps in this space through the New Zealand Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy that supports settlement information and services in five key area; employment, education and training, English language, inclusion, and health and wellbeing<sup>10</sup>. Employer education about actions that constitute exploitation would also be welcomed, as well as building awareness of the types of practices that can (either positively/negatively) impact our international workforce's sense of wellbeing.
- 3.5 The impact of COVID-19 and job losses have left many migrants in a precarious position with limited access to welfare or state support. This has fallen to local government, social

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<sup>10</sup> [Migrant settlement strategy \(newzealandnow.govt.nz\)](https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/migrant-settlement-strategy)

agencies and non-governmental organisations to source and provide assistance which is not sustainable and has been reactive, creating levels of high stress within the migrant community and agencies themselves. This has also highlighted an opportunity for improvement in the relationship between the migrant community and some government entities. Building trust in government is an important aspect of migrant settlement, particularly when migrants have left a country that is corrupt, embattled or authoritarian.

- 3.6 QLDC would like to see a transparent process to support and protect the local migrant community in times of any future economic shocks or emergencies. Locally, QLDC is aware COVID-19 had a significant impact on mental wellbeing, particularly with migrant inability to access low cost health services and fear that any confidential information around their health could potentially affect visa status.

#### **4.0 Support and partnership between central government and other invested parties needs to be developed to continue to make positive moves to reduce migrant exploitation.**

- 4.1 Support is required to understand the extent of exploitation happening in the community and the barriers to people experiencing exploitation from coming forward QLDC is interested in understanding whether there are any interventions that could then be supported at a local government level to reduce the risk of migrant exploitation. Exploration of issues by the labour inspectorate is required and it needs to be resourced accordingly.
- 4.2 Within a community made up of predominantly small and medium sized enterprises, the mechanisms for the labour inspectorate to monitor these businesses need to be outlined. Furthermore, the labour inspectorate should publicise who they are working with, such as industry bodies or Chambers of Commerce, to work on these issues. Some progress has been made in attempting to reduce exploitation in New Zealand through the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme aimed at demystifying information as well as linking, supporting and bridging between government authorities and local communities/individuals.