

# PICKING WINNERS?

NEW ZEALAND'S RECOGNISED SEASONAL EMPLOYER (RSE) POLICY  
AND ITS IMPACTS ON EMPLOYERS, PACIFIC WORKERS AND THEIR  
ISLAND – BASED COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

Over the preceding decade there has been intensifying academic and policy debate about the migration-development relationship and a resurgence of interest in circular and temporary migration. This thesis provides an examination of the first five years' (2007-2012) operation of New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy, a managed low-skilled circular migration scheme that currently allows for 8,000 workers to be recruited annually for up to 7 months' seasonal employment in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture (H/V) industries.

The RSE policy seeks to deliver the triple 'wins' to migrants, origin and destination countries that were identified at the United Nations High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in September 2006. The policy has been recognised nationally as well as internationally as an example of 'best practice' in the field of low-skilled managed circular migration.

The RSE policy is delivered through a system of relationships between employers, workers, and government agencies in a range of source countries, mainly in the Pacific region, and New Zealand. These relationships are examined at multiple scales: macro (national/international), meso (regional) and micro (household/individual) using concepts derived from systems theory and complexity theory. The RSE case study is situated in three contexts: theoretical (the migration and development literature); contextual (population movement in the Pacific Islands region); and empirical (labour supply issues facing producers in New Zealand's H/V industries).

This thesis employs a critical realist perspective to explore the objectives and outcomes of the RSE policy over the first five years. Multiple methods are used to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data relating to RSE workers from five Pacific countries, 16 employers in New Zealand, and key industry and government stakeholders in the source and destination countries. Data from primary and secondary sources are examined via an extensive process of data triangulation, to consolidate information accumulated over a wide geographic scope and timeframe.

Key findings indicate the RSE policy is achieving its stated short-term aims of assisting New Zealand employers to meet labour shortages and increase productivity, while also contributing to development in participating Pacific countries. However, complex policies like the RSE are dynamic and there are tensions that emerge between different stakeholders' objectives. There are important positive and negative feedback effects that contribute to this dynamism, and these require ongoing flexibility in the policy's management.

Managed circular migration programmes that involve mutual cooperation between governments of origin and destination countries, as well as between employers and communities that send and receive the migrant workers, have a high overhead in terms of the demands on government agencies to deliver the desired outcomes. They require continued investment and oversight if they are to deliver the expected benefits to all major stakeholders on a sustained basis. In the case of the RSE policy, these costs have been outweighed by the productivity gains for employers, financial gains (in island-dollar equivalents) for the workers, and improvements in living standards at the household and community level in participating island countries.

## DECLARATION

I, Charlotte Bedford, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AIP</b>	Approval in Principle
<b>ATR</b>	Agreement to Recruit
<b>AusAID</b>	The Australian Agency for International Development
<b>CTU</b>	Council of Trade Unions (New Zealand)
<b>DEEWR</b>	Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (Australia)
<b>DoL</b>	Department of Labour (New Zealand)
<b>ESU</b>	Employment Services Unit (Vanuatu)
<b>FRWPS</b>	Fiji Rural Work Permit Scheme
<b>FUWPS</b>	Fiji Urban Work Permit Scheme
<b>GCIM</b>	Global Commission for International Migration
<b>GFC</b>	Global Financial Crisis
<b>GFMD</b>	Global Forum on Migration and Development
<b>HLD</b>	High-Level Dialogue
<b>H/V</b>	Horticulture and viticulture
<b>IAU</b>	Inter-Agency Understanding
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>IDG</b>	International Development Group (New Zealand)
<b>IEA</b>	Individual Employment Agreement
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>INZ</b>	Immigration New Zealand
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>LMU</b>	Labour Mobility Unit (Solomon Islands)
<b>MBIE</b>	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (New Zealand)
<b>MCIL</b>	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (Samoa)
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Solomon Islands)
<b>MFAL</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Labour (Tuvalu)
<b>MFAT</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
<b>MIRAB</b>	Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy
<b>MLCI</b>	Ministry of Labour, Commerce and Industry (Tonga)
<b>MLHRD</b>	Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development (Kiribati)



<b>MML</b>	Meile Mei Langi
<b>MOTEYS</b>	Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sport (Tonga)
<b>MOU</b>	Memoranda of Understanding
<b>MSD</b>	Ministry of Social Development (New Zealand)
<b>NZAID</b>	New Zealand Aid
<b>NZHC</b>	New Zealand High Commission
<b>NZHITO</b>	New Zealand Horticulture Industry Training Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PAC</b>	Pacific Access Category
<b>PACER</b>	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
<b>PAILS</b>	Pacific Islands Labour Sending Forum
<b>PBP</b>	Pure Business Project
<b>PSWs</b>	Pacific Seasonal Workers
<b>PSWPS</b>	Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (Australia)
<b>RSE</b>	Recognised Seasonal Employer
<b>SAWP</b>	Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (Canada)
<b>SEU</b>	Seasonal Employment Unit (Samoa)
<b>SPP</b>	Strengthening Pacific Partnerships
<b>SPWPS</b>	South Pacific Work Permit Scheme
<b>SSE</b>	Supplementary Seasonal Employer
<b>SWAT</b>	Seasonal Worker Action Team (Samoa)
<b>SWP</b>	Seasonal Worker Program (Australia)
<b>TEC</b>	Temporary Employment Certificate
<b>TLMP</b>	Temporary Labour Migration Programme
<b>TRSE</b>	Transitional Recognised Seasonal Employer
<b>VAC</b>	Visa Application Centres
<b>VoC</b>	Variation of Conditions
<b>WINZ</b>	Work and Income New Zealand