

Parishes and Stakeholders Providing Pastoral Care for Seasonal Workers Network

The newly formed national network held an online, introductory meeting on 3rd March 2022. The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) and Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) are convening the sessions. The purpose of the network is to work closely with the parishes and stakeholders who provide pastoral care for seasonal workers, assist with information sharing, capability-building and networking to better understand and facilitate the concerns and welfare of seasonal workers.

Many of the seasonal workers come from our neighbouring countries, including the Pacific islands. Like many others they are facing significant challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic, workplace conditions, possible exploitation, poor accommodation, and hidden deductions from their salaries. In June 2016, Judge Jarrett in the Federal Circuit Court of Australia in Brisbane, heard one of the workers from Vanuatu lament: "Working for my boss was like slavery times." More than just a statement, it is a sad reality which continues to this day.

Columban Fr Peter O'Neill, ACRATH's representative on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Agriculture Committee, has worked tirelessly to support seasonal workers in Australia and assured all the attendees that ACRATH and ACMRO will provide the network with every possible assistance to help care for the labourers' needs. He affirmed that there is no concern which is too small nor too big for pastoral carers to bring to the network's attention.

The meeting and the formation of this network is a small step to ensure the voices of the seasonal workers will be heard so that something concrete can be done. All the attendees agreed that the network must be maintained and the invitation to join should be extended to all parishes and stakeholders who would like to take part in it.

Some useful links if you like to read more about Seasonal Workers in Australia:

- www.palmscheme.gov.au
- www.acrath.org.au/supporting-seasonal-workers
- www.catholicreligious.org.au/news/2020/4/14/religious-lead-way-in-fight-for-rights-of-migrant-seasonal-workers

For enquiries, please contact Don Gomez at don.gomez@acmro.catholic.org.au