# Working Holiday Maker Program Inquiry (Joint Standing Committee on Migration)

In June 2020, the Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs asked the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to inquire into and report on the Working Holiday Maker program (WHMP). The Salvation Army made a submission to this inquiry in partnership with the Uniting Church of Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

[Our joint submission](https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=1e5faa38-a7b6-4a6f-91e0-c0d2eadd597a&subId=690368) considered the official purpose of the WHMP, whether this purpose is reflected in current visa criteria and conditions, and how to ensure the WHMP ‘complements’ rather than ‘competes’ with Australian workers’ interests.

The key points of our submission are:

* The WHMP is not just a cultural exchange program. Regional work incentives have increasingly made it a labour program that key industries and regional communities rely on.
* Well-documented issues of exploitation and mistreatment of working holiday makers (WHMS) remain unaddressed. This is likely to have contributed to the program’s contraction in recent years.
* Unscrupulous employers and operators can easily evade detection and continue to exploit WHMs and other low-skill workers. This deters prospective employees—both migrant and Australian—from taking up work in industries like hospitality and horticulture. It also acts as a disincentive for those employers/operators benefiting from the system to hire workers who are more likely to stand up for themselves.

In our submission, we also identify the need for a national labour hire registration scheme to build oversight, transparency and accountability on the program. WHMs are only here for a short time. It is unrealistic to require them to report and participate in complex, lengthy legal battles over wage entitlements. The joint submission encourages the government to assume greater responsibility for what has become a de facto labour program to ensure employers are not able to exploit WHMS, exclude Australian workers from potential job markets, or under-cut competitors doing the right thing.

# The Committee report

An interim report was released in September 2020. It provided 10 recommendations, focused on immediate changes needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The Committee’s final report](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/024567/toc_pdf/FinalReportoftheInquiryintotheWorkingHolidayMakerProgram.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf) into the inquiry was released in November 2020 and provided 14 recommendations The final report focused on longer term changes, such as the need to implement the Report of the Migrant Worker Taskforce and to incentivise a broader range of visa holders to undertake agricultural and horticultural work.