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Managed Temporary Labour Migration of Pacific Islanders to Australia and New Zealand in the Early Twenty-first Century

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ABSTRACT

Circular migration was one of several enduring themes in Graeme Hugo's highly productive research career. Although his specialist field was Asian population movement, during the 2000s he became increasingly interested in labour migration in the Pacific Islands. This paper reviews the development of two managed circular migration schemes targeting Pacific labour that emerged following the UN High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006. New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme and Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) have attracted international attention as the kind of 'best practice' temporary labour migration schemes that Hugo had in mind when he emphasised the positive contributions that circular forms of mobility could make to development in both source and destination countries. The two schemes have transformed mobility between the participating countries and have played a major role in the negotiations over a free-trade agreement between Pacific Forum countries, including Australia and New Zealand. Although the schemes have been in operation for almost 10 years, this paper argues that they are not becoming 'business as usual'; they embody complex systems of relationships between multiple stakeholders that require ongoing management to ensure that they do not become traps for low-skilled, low-paid 'permanent' temporary workers.

KEY WORDS

Circular migration; Graeme Hugo; Pacific Islands; seasonal work schemes; Australia; New Zealand

Introduction

In early November 2016, two significant initiatives to foster research on migration were launched at the Hugo Conference (named after the late Professor Graeme Hugo AO, FASSA),¹ University of Liege in Belgium.² The first was the creation of the Hugo Observatory at the University of Liege, a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated specifically to the study of environmental change and migration. The second was the establishment of an international scholarly association for the study of environmental migration. Hugo's contribution to migration studies is enormous and it is gratifying to see the significance of his research being recognised in ways that will keep his legacy

alive. The Hugo Conference and the Hugo Observatory acknowledge his seminal work on links between migration and environmental change, and especially the major contributions he has made since the mid-1990s to debates about the relationships between climate change and migration (Hugo 1996; Hugo et al. 2009; Asian Development Bank 2012; Bedford and Hugo 2012).

During the 5 years before his untimely death in January 2015, Hugo was actively engaged with a number of research issues relating to the Pacific Islands. While the Pacific Islands were not sites for his primary research until quite late in his career, his long-standing interests in temporary forms of population movement in the Asia-Pacific region, coupled with his more recent explorations of the relationships between climate change and migration, inevitably led him into closer engagement with research in the Pacific. It is the connections that can be drawn between Hugo's research on temporary labour migration and recent policy initiatives in the Pacific that are the focus of discussion in this paper.

Hugo and the Pacific

Hugo's interest in forms of temporary migration goes back to his doctoral research on population circulation in Indonesia in the early 1970s (Hugo 1975). At the time he was carrying out his fieldwork, Bedford (1971) and Chapman (1970) were completing their doctoral research into a similar form of population movement in the western Pacific, while Skeldon (1974) was working on a similar process in the context of urbanisation in Peru. Over the subsequent three decades, these four geographers interacted in a range of situations and contexts to further understanding of the process of circular migration. For example, their major cross-national study of circulation in population movement was published in contributions to Chapman and Prothero (1985) and Prothero and Chapman (1985), and these were subsequently re-published by Routledge in 2014 in response to renewed interest in circular migration following the United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006.

Hugo's interest in migration processes in the Asia-Pacific region extended to New Zealand, and he developed a strong relationship with New Zealand's small community of demographers, geographers and sociologists specialising in the study of population dynamics and structures (Bedford 2015). He had a special interest in trans-Tasman migration and the New Zealand-born population in Australia, and worked closely with staff and postgraduate students at the University of Waikato's former Population Studies Centre (now National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis—NIDEA) on several externally funded research programmes addressing New Zealand's changing population (Hugo 2015).

Hugo was well aware of the different approaches taken by New Zealand and Australia to immigration from a number of Pacific Island countries. He favoured a more proactive approach to the socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by particular groups of Pacific countries, especially the central Pacific atolls and reef islands that are expected to be adversely affected by climate change, and was keen to see some New Zealand initiatives, such as the Pacific Access Category,³ adopted in Australia (Bedford and Hugo 2012). His interest in the fate of countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru was stimulated by his concerns about climate change and its impact on populations inhabiting low-lying coral

islands that ‘will be extremely vulnerable to sea-level rise, high-intensity cyclones and storm surges’ (Hugo 2010, 31).

In 2013, Hugo completed a major report for the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), namely its Microstate Futures Study on the role of temporary migration to Australia in facilitating development in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru. This confidential report (Hugo 2013) had a significant influence on the decision by Australia’s Department of Immigration and Border Protection to approve a ‘Pacific Microstates—Northern Australia Worker Pilot Program’ linked with the government’s *Developing Northern Australia* initiative (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). The 5-year pilot provides up to 250 (50 per year) citizens of Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu with access to a multi-year work visa (2 years, with an option of applying for a third year) to work in lower-skilled jobs in Northern Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) 2015a, 5).

New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) work policy, introduced in April 2007, was also of interest to Hugo. At the time of the RSE policy’s commencement, there was a renewed focus at the global level on the relationship between migration and development, and the potential for managed circular migration schemes, like the RSE, to deliver positive outcomes for both source and destination countries. Such programmes have a long and chequered history regarding their effectiveness, delivery of decent work conditions and the extent to which they uphold basic principles of human rights for workers (Martin 2002; Ruhs 2002; Castles 2006; Martin, Abella, and Kuptsch 2006), but the concept was the subject of renewed attention at the first United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006 (United Nations 2006).

The background report that was used to set the scene for the Dialogue, issued under the name of then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, had been strongly influenced by Hugo’s writing and engagement with the UN Population Division, which prepared the report. Hugo (2009) subsequently went on to write about ‘best practice’ in temporary labour migration, which aims to match migrant workers with appropriate jobs in destination countries, protect workers’ rights and welfare, and maximise development benefits for origin countries via the transfer of remittances, skills and knowledge. He argued that there were a number of advantages for lower-skilled workers of retaining a pattern of circular migration in preference to permanent settlement in destination countries (Hugo 2009). Hugo (2009, 9) acknowledged that temporary migration of lower-skilled workers in the Asia-Pacific region has been widely criticised as a ‘new form of indentured labour’, due in part to the restrictions placed on workers in the destination country and the lack of access to permanent residence. However, he argued that many problems associated with temporary labour migration schemes are due to poor governance; they are not intrinsic features of this form of migration. Temporary labour migration programmes can be successful if they are carefully managed and monitored and if there is effective cooperation between sending and receiving countries.

At the time he died, Hugo was finalising arrangements for the commencement of a multi-year ARC-funded research programme entitled ‘Demography and Diaspora: Enhancing Demography’s Contribution to Migration and Development’. The proposed research programme included a case study on Tonga that was to be carried out by one of his Tongan PhD students, Alisi Kautoke Holani. Holani’s (forthcoming) thesis explores temporary labour migration and sustainable development in the Pacific with special

reference to Tonga in the context of the ongoing negotiations over the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus. PACER Plus aims to create jobs, raise standards of living and encourage sustainable economic development in the Pacific region through increased regional trade and economic integration between the participating states.⁴ Holani's research into the contribution that Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) makes to household welfare in Tonga links with Hugo's long-standing interest in circular labour migration as a process that can contribute to development in migrant source communities as well as benefiting employers in the destination country (Hugo 2009).

There are some strong connections between Hugo's interests in access to temporary work opportunities for Pacific Islanders in Australia and climate change adaptation in the Pacific. Access to such opportunities could assist Pacific Islanders to develop livelihoods that may be sustainable under different environmental conditions in the future. The seasonal work schemes in Australia and New Zealand, which have provided temporary work visas for about 70 000 Pacific workers during the past decade, could become one of most significant policies for facilitating adaptation by Pacific families to changing environmental conditions in their own communities. Temporary work overseas is one of a number of strategies that Pacific peoples have adopted to spread risk of economic failure across a range of activities and options (Bedford 1973; Gibson 2015).

The next section of this paper reviews briefly some contemporary dimensions of New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme and Australia's Seasonal Worker Program, with particular attention to the numbers of workers involved. This is followed by some observations on the contributions that these schemes are making, firstly, to increased productivity for participating horticulture and viticulture businesses in destination countries, and secondly, to workers, their families and communities in the islands. This leads to a short section on the need for continued monitoring and management of the complex relationships that underpin such schemes to ensure that they do not become, by default, avenues for permanent seasonal employment for Pacific workers whose families and livelihoods remain in the islands.

In the final section we review briefly the role that the seasonal work schemes have played in the negotiations over new avenues for temporary employment of Pacific Islanders in Australia and New Zealand as part of the PACER Plus regional free-trade agreement that is currently being negotiated. The special provisions for labour mobility that are being negotiated as part of PACER Plus are quite different from the seasonal work schemes, however, in that they are likely to allow workers to transition to other types of visas and possibly, longer-term, to residence. This will inevitably lead to increasing pressure for the seasonal work policies to allow for some carefully managed transitions of highly skilled seasonal workers to permanent residence in Australia and New Zealand, rather than locking them into a pattern of annual, repeated return as 'permanent' temporary migrants.

The seasonal work schemes in 2016

In the nine years since the launch of the seasonal work schemes, about 70 000 temporary work visas for citizens of countries in the Pacific (including Timor Leste for Australia) have been approved under the two schemes (Table 1). In addition, New Zealand approved

Table 1. Total seasonal work approvals, July 2007–June 2016.

Period/year	Seasonal work visa approvals			Total ^b (RSE + SWP)
	RSE		SWP ^a	
	Pacific	All countries		
2007–08	3477	4426		4426
2008–09	5912	7617		
2009–10	5083	6829		
2010–11	5859	7619		
2011–12	6313	7742	{1633}	{31 440}
2012–13	6814	8175	1473	9648
2013–14	7047	8415	2014	10 429
2014–15	7853	9275	3177	12 452
2015–16	8327	9757	4490	14 247
2007–16	56 685	69 855	12 787	82 642

Notes:

^aData for the PSWPS December 2009–June 2012 are included (1633 visa approvals including a small number for Timor Leste workers). These figures are not available for individual years.

The total number of RSE visas for the period July 2008–June 2012 is 29 807 and these, combined with 1633 PSWPS visas, give a total of 31 440 for that period. The SWP figures include workers from Timor Leste in all years.

^bThe RSE “All countries” figures plus the SWP figures. The total for the 56 685 RSE “Pacific” plus the 12 787 SWP workers is 69 472.

Sources: unpublished data provided by the Pacifica Labour and Skills Team, Immigration New Zealand, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Wellington, New Zealand and the Seasonal Worker Program, Department of Employment, Canberra, Australia.

over 13 000 RSE visas for citizens of Asian countries, especially Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.⁵ The great majority of the visas for Pacific workers (57 000) have been for work in New Zealand; the Australian seasonal work scheme has evolved more slowly (with about 12 000 visas approved since 2009). This is largely due to the concessions that the Australian government has given to people on Working Holiday Maker (WHM) visas who are prepared to work in rural areas, along with the prevalence of illegal workers in the horticulture industry (Ball 2010; Doyle and Howes 2015; Commonwealth of Australia 2016). Australian horticultural employers have not yet seen the advantages that New Zealand’s RSEs have in employing Pacific workers (Hay and Howes 2012; Doyle and Howes 2015). Such advantages include the stability and security provided to employers each season, through the use of an increasingly experienced RSE workforce, and the associated gains in productivity as workers shift from the learning phase in the first year, to having acquired the requisite skills to perform various tasks on the orchard or vineyard (Bedford 2013).

The two seasonal work policies, while addressing a common problem relating to supply of low-skilled labour for the agricultural sector, have had different levels of buy-in from New Zealand and Australian employers from the outset (TNS 2011; Hay and Howes 2012; Doyle and Howes 2015; Curtain 2016). The New Zealand scheme was designed and introduced as part of an industry-led initiative that began in the early 2000s to address labour shortages, particularly in the apple industry, and to reduce the use of illegal labour (Whatman et al. 2005). From 2004, New Zealand horticulture and viticulture enterprises were using existing temporary migration policies to access Pacific labour and were prepared to engage with a managed seasonal migration scheme, crafted to meet their needs, as soon as it was introduced (Bedford 2013). Australian employers, on the other hand, were not accessing Pacific labour before the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS) was introduced in 2009, and employers had to be persuaded that

participation in the pilot scheme would be in their best interests. Furthermore, Australia's scheme was a government-led initiative with the primary objective of contributing to its aid development programme in the Pacific. Addressing unmet demands for labour in the horticulture industry was a secondary aim (Bedford 2013; Curtain 2016).

As the RSE approaches its 10th year, and the SWP heads for its 5th season, demand for Pacific seasonal workers in both countries continues to grow. The year ended June 2016 saw record numbers of seasonal workers from the Pacific approved for work in Australia and New Zealand. Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) approved 4490 visas (subclass 416) between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016, with 2624 going to Tongans and 1198 to ni-Vanuatu workers. These two countries accounted for 85 per cent of the seasonal work visas approved during the year. In the case of New Zealand, statistics for the year ended 30 June 2016 reveal that 9757 visas were approved with just under 4000 visas issued to citizens of Vanuatu (3932), followed by Tonga (1765) and Samoa (1550). These three countries accounted for 87 per cent of the seasonal work visa approvals.

The annual visa approvals, by country, for the year ended June 2016 are shown in Table 2. It can be seen that Tonga sent more seasonal workers to Australia (2624) than to New Zealand (1765) between July 2015 and June 2016. Tongan residents in rural Australia have played a major role in developing links with prospective employers and several Tongans run labour hire companies in Australia that bring in workers from the islands (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Holani *forthcoming*; Bedford 2013). By June 2016, Tonga had just under 4400 seasonal workers legally in Australia and New Zealand as well as an estimated 320 who had not returned home at the end of their contracts (300 in Australia and 20 in New Zealand).⁶ To date, the only Pacific workers on the limited-purpose RSE and SWP visas to have absconded in any numbers are Tongans. This is an issue that government officials in Tonga, as well as in Australia and New Zealand, are keen to address.

New Zealand's scheme remains restricted to the horticulture and viticulture sector and the RSE is currently capped at 10 500 arrivals per annum.⁷ Pacific RSE worker approvals and arrivals, by country, are shown in Table 3. Visa approvals always exceed arrivals because some workers either choose not take up the offer of work in the end or fail to get their visas approved in time to meet the employer's start date for employment. Arrivals are always just below the cap. As the New Zealand Minister of Immigration frequently

Table 2. Seasonal work visa approvals for Pacific countries, July 2015–June 2016.

Country	RSE	SWP	Total
Fiji	104	160	264
Kiribati	173	20	193
Nauru	20	20	40
Papua New Guinea	69	42	111
Samoa	1550	140	1690
Solomon Islands	649	61	710
Tonga	1765	2624	4389
Tuvalu	65	4	69
Vanuatu	3932	1198	5130
Total Pacific ^a	8327	4266	12 593

Note:

^aExcluding 1430 visas for RSE workers from Asian countries and 224 visas for SWP workers from Timor Leste.

Sources: see Table 1.

Table 3. RSE visa approvals and arrivals, Pacific countries, July 2015–June 2016.

Country	Approvals	Arrivals	% Arrived
Fiji	104	92	88.5
Kiribati	173	162	93.6
Nauru	20	20	100.0
Papua New Guinea	69	68	98.6
Samoa	1550	1454	93.8
Solomon Islands	649	590	90.9
Tonga	1765	1687	95.6
Tuvalu	65	64	98.5
Vanuatu	3932	3726	94.8
Total Pacific	8327	7863	94.4
Total RSE scheme ^a	9757	9276	95.1

Note:

^aIncluding workers from Asian countries. The cap for RSE arrivals is currently 9500.

Source: unpublished data obtained from New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

reminds officials as well as employers: the cap is not a target—it is the ceiling for approved arrivals (Woodhouse 2015).

RSE workers are one of several sources of labour that can meet industry needs in New Zealand, including those approved on Working Holiday visas or on study visas as international students. In 2014, the Ministry of Social Development introduced a seasonal work scheme for New Zealanders to encourage more unemployed and underemployed citizens to take advantage of employment opportunities during peak seasons in the horticulture and viticulture industries. This scheme, which included subsidies for travel and pastoral care, placed about 300 unemployed New Zealanders in seasonal jobs with RSE employers during the year ended June 2016 (Tolley 2016).

For most approved employers, RSE workers comprise less than 40 per cent of their temporary workforce during peak seasons. New Zealanders, working holidaymakers ('backpackers') and international students make up the remainder of the seasonal labour force. While the RSE scheme has virtually no capacity for growing the numbers of arrivals, there remains some ability to spread the benefits of employing Pacific seasonal workers across more employers through the use of joint Approvals to Recruit (ATRs). About 2000 Pacific workers in 2015–16 were employed on joint ATRs (Rarere 2016). Officials and employers use joint ATRs to extend the periods of employment for RSE workers within the permitted 7 months for all countries other than Kiribati and Tuvalu (9 months). In both Australia and New Zealand, workers from Kiribati and Tuvalu are permitted to stay longer than others because of the high costs they pay for international transport to reach their work destination (Bedford and Bedford 2010; DFAT 2015a).

The cap of 5000 seasonal workers in Australia's SWP was removed in 2015, and the programme was expanded to the agriculture (aquaculture, cotton and cane) and accommodation industries in specified locations, as well as the tourism sector in Northern Australia.⁸ There is considerable scope for expansion of the SWP; the big challenge is to encourage greater employer participation. The higher costs associated with recruiting workers from the Pacific have been identified as a key barrier to entry into the programme. These costs make Pacific workers less competitive against working holidaymakers and other sources of locally available labour (Doyle and Howes 2015). Australian employers need to be persuaded that the costs of recruiting and employing Pacific seasonal workers are outweighed by the increased productivity that comes from having a core supply of reliable

and increasingly experienced labour during peak harvesting and pruning periods. Evidence of these productivity gains is discussed further below, but it can be noted here that a small number of Australian employers and contractors have reported positively on productivity gains that they can link to the use of SWP workers (Jenkin 2015; Owen 2015).

The significance of seasonal work opportunities

In his book reviewing health worker migration in the Pacific, Connell (2009, 173) effectively dismissed managed migration schemes, such as the RSE and SWP, as a form of mobility that ‘offers barely a Band-Aid’ within the context of burgeoning labour forces and demand for employment opportunities in the region. This has proved to be a surprisingly parsimonious perspective on the extent to which managed seasonal labour migration has provided opportunities for low-skilled workers from some Pacific states to gain temporary employment in the labour markets of New Zealand and Australia since 2007.

The significance of the limited-purpose visa as a pathway for Pacific Islanders to access temporary work in New Zealand and Australia varies by country. Table 4 shows the numbers of RSE visas as well as the total temporary work visas (all types, including RSE visas) approved for New Zealand between July 2007 and June 2016 for each Pacific country participating in the RSE scheme, and shows the percentage of total temporary work visas that are accounted for by the RSE scheme. In the case of Fiji, with its large pool of skilled and semi-skilled labour, and its late inclusion in the RSE (2014) and SWP (2015),⁹ the seasonal work schemes have not even been a ‘band aid’—they have been irrelevant. Over 60 000 Fiji citizens found temporary employment in New Zealand during that period via other work visas, especially the Essential Skills visa for more skilled workers.

For citizens of Papua New Guinea and Nauru, which had pilot projects in the RSE in 2013 and 2014 respectively, seasonal work visas have comprised under 40 per cent of the total temporary work visas their citizens have had in New Zealand since the commencement of the RSE scheme in 2007. Tuvalu, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga, all island states with access to earlier temporary work schemes in New Zealand, as well as to quotas for residence visas,¹⁰ have between 40 and 53 per cent of their temporary work visa approvals between 2007 and 2016 accounted for by seasonal work visas. Seasonal work opportunities are more than a ‘band aid’ for these countries, although for Kiribati and Tuvalu the numbers involved in any form of temporary work in New Zealand and Australia are small.

Table 4. RSE work visas and all temporary work visas, New Zealand, July 2007–June 2016.

Country	Total temporary work visas	RSE visas	% RSE visas
Fiji	60 553	135	0.2
Kiribati	2611	1154	44.2
Nauru	108	40	37.0
Papua New Guinea	897	279	31.1
Samoa	22 757	11 088	48.7
Solomon Islands	4301	3751	87.2
Tonga	25 858	13 846	53.5
Tuvalu	1598	673	42.1
Vanuatu	26 268	25 719	97.9
Total RSE Pacific	144 951	56 685	39.1

Source: unpublished data obtained from New Zealand’s Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

The most significant contributions that the RSE scheme has made to access to temporary work opportunities in New Zealand have been for Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. These two countries have had very limited access to any kind of temporary work overseas since the nineteenth-century 'labour trade' with Queensland (Munro 1990) and the movement of people linked with the Anglican Church (the Melanesian Mission) to New Zealand (Mallon 2012). The RSE scheme has been especially significant for Vanuatu in this regard, providing 25 719 seasonal work visas—98 per cent of all temporary work visas that citizens of Vanuatu have obtained since 2007 (Table 4).

Overall, seasonal work visas accounted for 39 per cent of the 144 951 temporary work visas approved for citizens of the Pacific countries participating in the RSE scheme between 2007 and 2016. In the case of Australia, data for the 2012–13 financial year showed that around 47 per cent of all temporary work visas issued to Pacific citizens from countries that participate in the SWP were for seasonal work (Bedford and Bedford 2013). Arguably, the access to temporary work provided by the RSE scheme and SWP could be considered relatively insignificant in the context of overall labour force growth and demand for job opportunities in the Pacific. However, managed migration programmes such as the RSE and the SWP are not going to be replaced easily by other kinds of access to temporary work in Australia and New Zealand, and both schemes provide an important opportunity for offshore employment that is valued by the governments of participating Pacific states.

The seasonal work schemes: 'wins' for employers and workers?

The RSE scheme has gained international recognition as a 'best practice' managed circular migration programme (International Labour Organization 2009; McKenzie and Gibson 2010). Many of the features that Hugo (2009) concluded were 'best practice' in recruitment and selection—pre-departure preparation, pastoral care and monitoring of conditions at the destination, and assistance with re-integration back into home communities—are features of the RSE and its associated Strengthening Pacific Partnerships (SPP) programme as well as the SWP and its Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP).¹¹

All employer-led temporary work schemes that operate on the basis of a limited-purpose visa can be criticised because of restrictions on the freedom of workers to choose the length of their employment, the conditions under which they are employed, or to shift to a different employer in search of better conditions or higher wages (Preibisch 2007). Both the Australian and New Zealand schemes have strict constraints around arrival, departure, length of stay, and the eligibility of employers/contractors. There are also mandatory requirements regarding the payment of tax, paying for a share of the international airfare, paying insurance levies, covering accommodation costs and contributing to transport costs to and from the workplace and, if required, within the workplace. Some of these 'fixed' costs, which are paid by the employer upfront and then subsequently deducted automatically from the workers' earnings, are subject to manipulation, especially the local transport and accommodation costs. There have been complaints both in New Zealand and Australia about excessive charges, particularly regarding weekly rates for shared accommodation. These issues have been raised in many of the major studies of both seasonal work schemes (see, for example, theses by Rockell 2015; Bailey 2014;

Bedford 2013 on the RSE; Gibson and McKenzie 2011 and Holani (forthcoming) on the SWP; and Brickenstein 2015 on both schemes).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, the schemes are deemed by many stakeholders to be delivering ‘wins’ for participating employers, workers and their families. There is clear evidence from successive surveys of horticulture and viticulture enterprises in New Zealand that the RSE scheme has delivered major productivity gains for many participating employers. These gains have enabled them to invest in business improvements and expansion at a consistently higher rate than non-participants (Research New Zealand 2015). Participating employers are also employing larger shares of unemployed New Zealanders referred to them by Work and Income New Zealand than non-participating employers, as well as creating more permanent jobs for New Zealanders. Evidence of the crucial role the RSE scheme plays in raising industry standards and productivity, as well as generating additional job opportunities for New Zealanders, contributed to the government’s decision to raise the cap on RSE workers from 8000 to 9000 for the year 2014–15 to 9500 for the year 2015–16, and to 10 500 from November 2016.

Data collected in 2011 from nine RSEs on the gross earnings of their seasonal workers (RSE workers, permanent and casual New Zealand workers and working holidaymakers) provided evidence of the higher productivity of RSE workers on the orchard/vineyard, when compared with other groups (Bedford 2013, 2014). Data on gross earnings per worker were collected over a 10-week period and productivity was measured by the quantity of fruit picked/vines pruned when employed on contract or ‘piece’ rates.¹² The higher earnings of the RSE workers, as shown in Table 5, were due primarily to three factors: their desire to earn as much money as possible while in New Zealand; their higher rate of attendance at work; and their experience of and willingness to undertake agricultural work (most RSE workers were from rural communities in the islands). Respondents to the annual RSE Monitoring Survey also regularly report favourably on RSE worker performance and attitude (Research New Zealand 2015).

Views on the extent to which participation in the RSE scheme has produced ‘wins’ for the workers are mixed. On the one hand, the gross amounts earned by Pacific RSE workers over several months of seasonal work are significantly higher than the incomes that rural workers can obtain at home. On the other hand, the costs of participation in the RSE for workers and their families are significant. Research conducted by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) (2015) has attempted to assess the effects of standard deductions (income tax, insurance, accommodation, local transport, share of the airfare to New Zealand) on gross incomes, as well as the amount and frequency of

Table 5. Weeks worked and earnings for RSE and non-RSE workers, 2011.

Measure	Pacific RSE workers	Non-RSE workers	All workers
Number in group	418	145	563
Average weeks worked	9.97	7.01	9.21
Maximum earnings (NZ\$)	11 378	10 411	11 378
Minimum earnings (NZ\$)	3924	168	168
Median earnings (NZ\$)	6862	4158	6548
Average earnings (NZ\$)	6890	4163	6178
Standard deviation (NZ\$)	1265	2509	2056
Coefficient of variation (%)	18.4	32.9	33.2

Source: Bedford (2013, 312).

remittance transfers made by RSE workers over the season. Research has also been done on the impact of remittances (in cash and kind) for participating households and communities, as well as the impact of worker absences on households in Tonga (Holani [forthcoming](#); Rohorua et al. 2009) and Vanuatu (Rohorua et al. 2009; Bailey 2015, 2014; Craven 2015; Rockell 2015). But a question remains: do seasonal workers in New Zealand—especially those from the more distant participating countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands—make enough money in 6–9 months of seasonal work to cover the full costs of participating (including living costs in New Zealand), as well as having a good return on their labour to compensate for the lengthy absences from home? To our knowledge, a full analysis of the costs and benefits of participation by Pacific workers in the RSE scheme has not been undertaken.

Notwithstanding the lack of clarity around the real costs of participation, large numbers of workers wish to make repeated trips to New Zealand (about 80 per cent of New Zealand's RSE workers have been back for two or more seasons), and the money obtained from seasonal work plays a vital role in improving the livelihoods of participating households and communities. Money earned in New Zealand is used for a variety of purposes: to meet basic needs (such as food, clothing, basic household amenities); to invest in children's education; renovate or build new homes; purchase land or large goods (vehicles, boats, household appliances); support other relatives; and make contributions to the church (see, for example, Rohorua et al. 2009; McKenzie and Gibson 2010; Bailey 2015, 2014; MBIE 2015; Rockell 2015 among others).

RSE workers' remittance transfers back to the islands can be considerable. Recent analysis of data collected in the MBIE-sponsored Remittance Pilot Project 2014/15,¹³ for 264 Samoans and 223 Tongans employed by four orchards and two contractors, revealed that, on average, both groups sent home about 30 per cent of their gross earnings via Western Union or another electronic money transfer agency (Table 6). There were two types of transfers: regular remittances during the course of the time they were working, and a large lump-sum transfer, usually including holiday pay and savings, at the end of the period of employment.¹⁴

On average, Tongans had higher total and regular remittances, as well as larger average transfers each time they sent money home during their employment, than Samoans. However, the average regular remittance made at each transfer by both groups was similar (about NZ\$350–370). Tongans remitted on a slightly higher share of the weeks

Table 6. Remittances (NZ\$) by Samoans and Tongans over 22–30 weeks, RSE pilot survey, 2014–15.

Measure	Samoans	Tongans
Number of workers	264	223
Average weeks worked	25	26
Percentage of weeks worked remitted	45.2	53.2
Coefficient of variation (%)	43.9	43.4
Average value of each regular remittance (NZ\$)	359	371
Coefficient of variation (%)	74.1	55.6
Average total regular remittances while working (NZ\$)	3495	4618
Coefficient of variation (%)	60.6	60.2
Average total remittances including final transfer (NZ\$)	6089	6176
Coefficient of variation (%)	50.2	52.1

Source: Bedford and Bedford (2016).

they were working (53 per cent) than Samoans (45 per cent). There were large variations in all of the measures of remittances as reflected in coefficients of variation that regularly exceeded 40 per cent. In light of this variability, the averages need to be interpreted with caution.

The remittances reported as cash transfers are only part of the returns from seasonal work going back to families in the islands. As noted above, there are also remittances in kind (goods taken home by the worker or sent home by post or in containers at the end of their time in work), as well as money carried home as cash. These can be quite considerable, as research by Bailey (2015) shows for workers from Vanuatu, and Holani (forthcoming) shows for the Tongan workers she interviewed in the islands and in Australia. The Tongans and Samoans interviewed for the Remittance Pilot Project 2014/15 (MBIE 2015) probably did not have large sums of money to carry home as cash. By the time their remittances and standard deductions had been removed from their gross incomes, workers had only about 33 per cent of the money they earned to cover living expenses and any other purchases while in New Zealand. This worked out, on average, at about NZ\$340 a week for Samoans out of average weekly gross earnings of NZ\$860, and NZ\$297 a week for Tongans out of gross average weekly earnings of NZ\$775 (Bedford and Bedford 2016). No comparable data on earnings and remittances for SWP workers were available at the time of writing.

In addition to their earnings, RSE and SWP workers have access to training while in the host countries. In Australia, Registered Training Organisations offer training in English literacy and numeracy, information technology skills and first aid (DFAT 2015b). In New Zealand, training is provided through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)-funded Vakameasina programme, which is available in most regions where RSE workers are employed, and covers English literacy and numeracy, financial literacy, health and life skills training (Bedford 2013). Non-government organisations, such as Fruit of the Pacific, also offer health-related courses as well as support with community development initiatives.¹⁵ A number of RSE employers have provided direct support to rural communities where they recruit their RSE labour. Such support has included: installing or repairing water pumps to provide clean drinking water; building a floating jetty for landing cargo and people; and building a new kindergarten and medical centre (Bedford 2013; Bailey 2014). There have also been some joint ventures involving agricultural production in Vanuatu (coffee growing on Tanna) and vegetable growing in Samoa. Information about these has been provided by employers at their annual conferences, including one in Samoa in 2015 when participants visited villages where these sorts of ventures were being undertaken.¹⁶

On balance, we consider that there have been 'wins' for workers through their participation in the RSE and SWP, although there is far less published research available in regards to the latter. But what about the workers' home communities? Again, there are mixed views here. Rockell's (2015) 'critical lens' on the schemes suggests that the benefits for workers and communities in Vanuatu have been overstated by a focus on the more obvious material dimensions of development. Craven (2015) and Bailey (2014) have also drawn attention to mixed benefits to source communities in their fieldwork with ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers. There can be major disruptions to rural social life caused by repeated absences of adult men and women, as well as by the new attitudes that workers bring home. Changing wealth and power relationships in communities are

emerging among those who have regular access to seasonal work overseas and those who have not been selected, or who have chosen not to participate in the seasonal work programmes. The Pacific liaison officers who facilitate the RSE scheme have observed these trends for some time, and they are now being given greater priority for research in both New Zealand and Australia. Re-integration of workers back into their communities and breaking the cycle of repeated annual commitments to seasonal work among those who are encouraged by employers to return regularly, are two issues that require greater attention from officials, employers and researchers.

The least-studied aspect of the seasonal work schemes is their impacts on society and economy in the host communities. In some parts of New Zealand and Australia there are significant fluctuations in population linked with seasonal peaks in demand for workers in the accommodation and the agricultural sectors. Little attention has been given to the impacts of influxes of seasonal workers on community services, infrastructure, commerce and social cohesion. In some communities in New Zealand's South Island, for example, the RSE scheme brought significant numbers of Pacific people into their lives for the first time. The small Central Otago town of Alexandra (population 4800 in 2013) hosts over 1000 temporary workers during the fruit picking and pruning seasons, 500 of whom are ni-Vanuatu. Bailey (2014) describes some of the early adjustments that Alexandra's predominantly 'pakeha' or European-descent population made in accommodating several hundred Melanesians, especially during the summer months.

Contemporary, 'best practice' seasonal work schemes are best conceptualised as complex systems of relationships that span individuals (workers, employers, contractors, government officials), organisations (government agencies, industry organisations, unions, insurance companies, accommodation services) and communities (families and wider social groups in the islands and in the destination countries). The first systematic evaluation of the RSE scheme (Evaluate Research 2010) included a useful schematic diagram to capture both the mix of relationships and the range of stakeholders (Figure 1). This seasonal work system, like all complex systems of social and economic relations, is dynamic and constantly adjusting to changing circumstances in both the source and destination communities. There is no such thing as 'business as usual' in the contemporary 'best practice' seasonal work schemes.

It is this dynamism that should allow the RSE scheme and the SWP to avoid some of the challenges the Canadian Seasonal Worker Agricultural Program (SAWP) has faced as the use of seasonal workers became 'integral to the enterprises that employ them' (Preibisch 2007, 439). Under Canadian policy, employers are allowed to request the same workers to return each season, and, with repeated trips, workers are becoming highly skilled and experienced. Some workers have spent up to 25 years in the Canadian scheme, employed on seasonal contracts for up to 8 months each year, and without any pathways to permanent residence.

The RSE scheme and the SWP have been designed, from the outset, to provide a short-term source of employment to further the livelihoods of Pacific workers and their families in the islands. However, like the Canadian workers, with repeated trips to New Zealand and Australia each year (some RSE workers have now been to New Zealand for nine consecutive seasons), a number of Pacific workers are becoming highly skilled at specialist tasks on the orchard/vineyard that generate good returns for their commercial employers. Where Pacific workers are performing skilled work, and wish to pursue careers in these

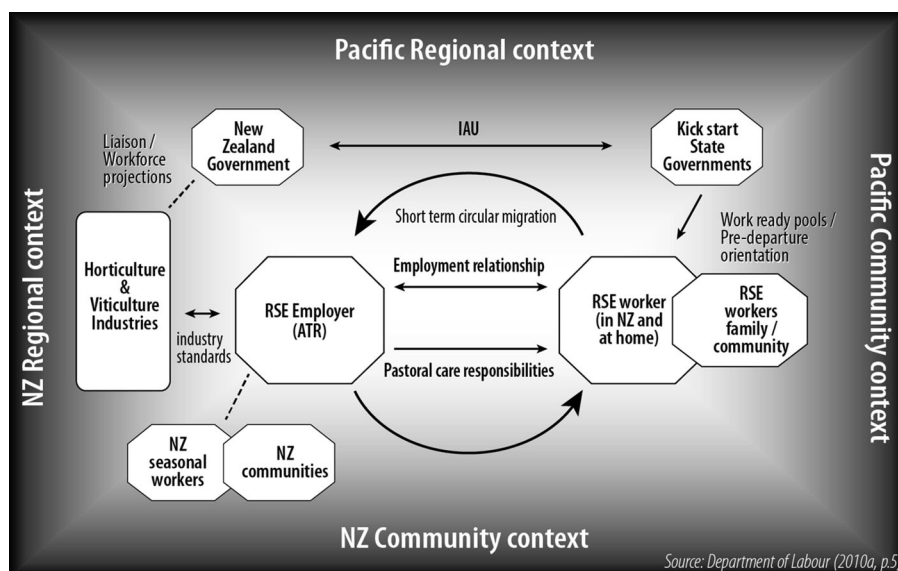


Figure 1. The RSE system. Source: Bedford (2013) based on a diagram in Evalue Research (2010, 5).

Note: IAU refers to Interagency Understanding—the form of agreement signed between New Zealand’s former Department of Labour and partner Departments/Ministries in the governments of participating Pacific states.

industries longer-term, the seasonal work policies need to be flexible enough to allow for some carefully managed transitions to permanent residence in Australia and New Zealand, rather than locking workers into a pattern of annual, repeated return for seasonal work. In this context, the negotiations surrounding a comprehensive free-trade agreement that would encompass all of the Pacific Islands Forum countries including Australia and New Zealand provide some insights into future labour mobility relationships with Pacific countries.

The seasonal work schemes and PACER Plus

Australia’s and New Zealand’s seasonal work schemes have become the focus of considerable attention in the negotiations surrounding PACER Plus. Negotiators representing Pacific states have insisted on the inclusion of some special provisions in this agreement for the movement of semi- and low-skilled labour. These would be in addition to the usual General Agreement on Trade in Services Mode 4 (GATS 4) arrangements for movement of people with specialist professional skills that are part of most contemporary free-trade agreements.

A non-binding Labour Mobility Arrangement, relating to the movement of semi- and low-skilled labour that would sit alongside the PACER Plus Agreement, is in the final stages of negotiation. Precise details of this Arrangement have not been made public, but it is known that there will be provision for a Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) at which specific proposals to increase access to employment opportunities in Australia and New Zealand will be discussed. The initial PLMAM was held in New Zealand in late August 2016, and two pilot projects—the employment of Pacific trades workers in the rebuilding of Christchurch after the devastating earthquakes there

in 2010–11, and the employment of offshore fisheries workers in New Zealand’s commercial fishing fleet—were a focus of discussion at this meeting.

In addition, Australian negotiators have made it clear that once PACER Plus is signed the SWP will be extended to all Pacific Islands Forum countries.¹⁷ This will provide other Polynesian (Cook Islands and Niue) and Micronesian states (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands) with seasonal work opportunities, subject to employer demand (DFAT 2015a). However, Cook Islanders and Niueans already have access to the Australian labour market by virtue of their New Zealand citizenship, while Palauans, citizens of FSM and the Marshall Islands have access to the United States through their Compacts of Free Association (Bedford, Burson, and Bedford 2014; Howes 2015). It remains to be seen whether employers will recruit from the northern Micronesia states following the signing of PACER Plus, given the high transport costs involved.

The big gains for the Pacific under the Labour Mobility Arrangement will be in accessing other types of temporary work visas—visas that may allow skilled workers to transition to residence and to be united with their families in Australia or New Zealand. Providing pathways to residence will address a fundamental concern about temporary labour migration schemes, namely the employment restrictions placed on temporary workers and their lack of mobility in the destination country (Preibisch 2007). Hugo (2009) argued that such pathways should be provided, under certain conditions, as an element of ‘best practice’ in the destination country. If the PLMAM does deliver such opportunities, there will be increasing pressure from horticulture and viticulture employers, as well as highly skilled seasonal workers, for a pathway to longer-term residence that provides them with the same privileges.

Back to Hugo and the Pacific

It is appropriate to conclude by returning to research that Hugo was undertaking on Pacific migration at the time of his untimely death in 2015. Hugo supported greater engagement with Pacific countries through migration and this was reflected clearly in his work for AusAID on the Pacific microstate work pilot and his plans for a major book on migration and climate change in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁸ He was also a strong supporter of the ideas that two Australian economists had been promoting over two decades in their assessments of Pacific migration for AusAID, namely the merit in adopting policies, like New Zealand’s Pacific Access Category, as part of a suite of initiatives to contribute to Pacific development (Appleyard and Stahl 1995; Stahl and Appleyard 2007).

Hugo (2009, 67) acknowledged that ‘there is no single best practice in temporary labour migration which is suited to all or even most origin and/or destination countries’. Rather, what is implemented and ‘what works’ is heavily dependent on context. Moreover, the dynamic nature of schemes such as the RSE and the SWP, which are built on a complex web of stakeholder relationships and that require flexibility among participants to adapt to changing circumstances in source and destination countries, means such programmes require ongoing investment and governmental oversight. He emphasised the need to ‘enhance our understanding of what is likely to work under what conditions’ and argued that this could be achieved by sharing the lessons learned by individual

countries with others (Hugo 2009, 68). Graeme Hugo's enormous experience of migration processes and his pragmatic approach to potential policy options (McAuliffe 2016) would have been greatly appreciated by officials in Australia and New Zealand as they seek to reach an agreed compromise over mobility arrangements linked with PACER Plus, and as they continue to manage a growing number of temporary labour migration schemes that aim to contribute to development in the Pacific.

Notes

1. In 2012 Graeme Hugo, a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (FASSA), was awarded the civil honour of Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AO) for his service to population research.
2. <http://events.ulg.ac.be/hugo-conference/conference/>
3. The Pacific Access Category (PAC) was introduced in 2002 and provides small annual residence quotas for Fiji (250), Tonga (250), Kiribati (75) and Tuvalu (75). Fiji lost its entitlement under the PAC after the 2006 military coup; this was re-established in 2015.
4. A useful introduction to PACER Plus can be found at the website of New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) at <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/agreements-under-negotiation/pacer/> (accessed May 29, 2016). Howes (2014) has prepared a useful outline of the labour mobility dimensions of the PACER Plus negotiations.
5. Data on New Zealand's temporary work visas can be obtained from <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics> (accessed July 12, 2016).
6. The numbers of Tongans who have absconded or overstayed their seasonal work visas are estimates obtained during conversations with officials in New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and Australia's Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP). At the time of writing (October 2016), LMAP was in the process of commissioning research into the Tongan absconder issue in Australia.
7. The RSE scheme has always had a cap on numbers of seasonal workers who are permitted to enter the country each year in order to protect this type of work for New Zealanders. The initial cap was 5000 but this was reached within 2 years. The cap was then raised to 8000, where it remained until July 2015 when it was raised to 9000 and then in November 2015 to 9500 followed by a further increase in November 2016 to 10 500.
8. Expansion of the SWP to include Northern Australia's tourism sector is part of the Australian government's strategy for developing Northern Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). Details of changes to the SWP can be found at https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/swp_tourism_pilot_fact_sheet_final.pdf and https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/expansion_of_the_seasonal_worker_programme_-_faqs.pdf (accessed July 2, 2016).
9. Fiji was excluded from participation in both schemes until the end of the 2006 military coup regime and the democratic election of the current government in 2014.
10. From the mid-1970s until 2002, New Zealand had temporary work schemes for Samoan and Tongan citizens. For Kiribati and Tuvalu similar schemes operated from the late 1980s until 2002 and for Fiji from the mid-1970s until the first military *coup d'état* in 1987. From the late 1960s, there has been a quota of 1100 a year for Samoan citizens seeking work and residence in New Zealand. The Pacific Access Category (PAC), introduced in 2002, provides small annual residence quotas for Fiji (250), Tonga (250), Kiribati (75) and Tuvalu (75). Fiji lost its entitlement under the PAC after the 2006 military coup; this was re-established in 2015. Further information on these arrangements can be found in Bedford (2008) and Mahina-Tuai (2012).
11. Both the RSE scheme and the SWP are supported by capacity-building programmes funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) (New Zealand) and DFAT (Australia),

respectively. MFAT provides financial support for the Strengthening Pacific Partnerships (SPP) project to strengthen the capacity of Pacific countries to participate in labour mobility schemes. Details about the SPP can be found in Nunns et al. (2013). DFAT has contracted Cardno to deliver the LMAP that has been designed to increase the supply and quality of seasonal workers, strengthen linkages with Australian employers and maximise development impacts of the SWP. Further information on the LMAP can be found at <http://www.lmaprogram.org> (accessed July 15, 2016).

12. Of the 563 workers for whom 10 weeks of gross weekly wages were available, 418 (74 per cent) were Pacific RSE workers while the remaining 145 (26 per cent) included New Zealand regular employees (57), New Zealand casual workers (55) and backpackers (33).
13. The MBIE Remittance Pilot Project was undertaken between November 2014 and June 2015. Data were collected on earnings and remittances for 640 Samoan and Tongan men employed by six RSEs in Hawke's Bay for periods ranging from 8 to 30 weeks. Initial reports on the survey's findings were published late in 2015 (Gounder 2015; MBIE 2015). Additional analysis of the data was undertaken in 2016 to provide a more detailed review of statistics relating to earnings and remittances for 487 (76 per cent) of the 640 workers covered in the pilot project. The 487 workers covered in the analysis were employed continuously for a minimum of 22 weeks (Bedford and Bedford 2016).
14. Information on remittance transfers was collected weekly from the workers by supervisors and pastoral care workers. Evidence of sums transferred came from receipts provided by the money transfer agencies. There were also interviews with 520 workers where information on preferences for remittance transfer agents, plans for use of remittances back in the islands, amongst other topics, was collected. Some of these data are summarised in the reports prepared by Gounder (2015) and MBIE (2015).
15. See, for example, Fruit of the Pacific's recent initiative involving water filters for communities on Tanna (where ni-Vanuatu RSE workers employed by Baygold are recruited from). Available at <https://www.facebook.com/FruitOfThePacific/> (accessed July 16, 2016).
16. Information on the RSE Conferences can be obtained from the web under 'RSE Conference xxxx (year)'. Many of the presentations made at the RSE Conference held in Apia in July 2015 are available at <http://www.hortnz.co.nz/our-work/people/rse-conference-2015-presentations/> (accessed October 14, 2016).
17. At present there are 10 countries participating in the SWP: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in the Pacific, as well as Timor Leste in Southeast Asia.
18. During 2014 Hugo was in negotiations with Edward Elgar about a book on climate change and migration in the Asia-Pacific region that drew on a major interdisciplinary study he had led for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Asian Development Bank 2012; Hugo et al. 2009). The ADB study included sections on the Pacific Islands that were developed in collaboration with Richard Bedford, extending an existing joint research programme on migration and development in the Pacific region (Bedford and Hugo 2012). There have been discussions amongst Hugo's colleagues about pursuing this book venture, but a decision has been taken recently by Associate Professor Yan Tan (University of Adelaide) to commission papers for a special edition of *Population and Environment* as a way of recognising Hugo's very significant contribution to the study of climate change and migration.

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