

The Honourable Clare O'Neil MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

19 July 2023

Dear Minister O'Neil,

Re: Working hour caps for international student workers

We write further to our letter of June 26 regarding the introduction of working hour caps for international student workers.

We note that these caps have now come into place. We advise that as a result of these caps, this policy is exacerbating the current skills shortage crisis that is faced by the restaurant and catering sector.

We are currently receiving feedback from both members and non-members in relation to black-market activity as a result of the introduction of this cap. In short, we understand that some businesses are continuing to employ international students beyond their allowed fortnightly cap. Similarly students are seeking employment beyond their allowed fortnightly cap as they are in dire need of a sustainable income.

Given the current policy environment, the R&CA holds the following concerns:

- There is now a very real risk that some businesses may exploit students;
- There is now a very real risk that overseas students will become exploited;
- Given the record low unemployment rate of 3.5%, Australia has fewer available workers in which to call upon;
- Given the current acute skills shortages, businesses are now having to reduce their operational capacity in order to comply with this new policy;
- The existence of the fortnightly cap has now created an underemployment issue within the overseas students cohort who are otherwise ready, willing, and able to work;
- Importantly to the above point, given our record low unemployment rate, this cohort of overseas students are not "taking" or "threatening" jobs that Australian's might otherwise have; and
- International students are unable to satisfactorily support themselves throughout their studies due to the rising cost of living that they are also facing.

As you may be aware, the Aged Care sector received a carve-out in relation to this policy, specifically that students working in the aged care sector from 9 May 2023 can work unrestricted hours within their sector until 31 December 2023.

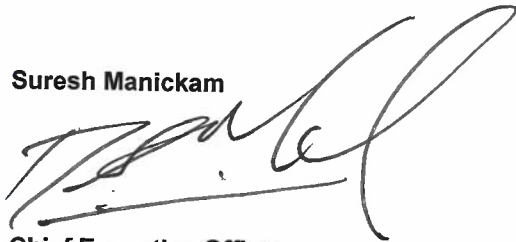
Our sector is highly aligned with the Aged Care sector. Our sector plays an integral role in providing essential services within the realm of aged care, disability care, health care as well as aviation catering.

We urgently seek your assistance to revise the decision in relation to the introduction of a fortnightly cap. Further, we request that our sector be treated the same as the aged care sector, specifically that the cap be removed until December 31st with a review thereafter.

If you have any questions relating to this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact R&CA's Policy and Campaigns Advisor, Amy Teakle at policy@rca.asn.au.

Regards,

Suresh Manickam



Chief Executive Officer
Restaurant and Catering Australia