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Abbott Government sells out Australian workers with 457 visa review

There is no surprise that a Government review by a panel of business leaders has recommended scrapping requirements for employers to try to hire local workers before bringing in cheaper foreign workers on 457 visas.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the recommendation in the 457 program review to abolish labour market testing is ludicrous.

“Unemployment is at a 12 year high yet instead of creating a plan for jobs and investing in skills and training, yet the answer from the Government and big business is to make it easier for employers to bring in foreign workers,” said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

“Across the country we’re seeing employers cutting apprentice numbers and investment in training – then complaining they are unable to find skilled workers while youth unemployment soars,” Ms Kearney said.

Unions have always maintained that employers must show they have tested the labour market locally before looking for workers overseas, while employers who do recruit workers on 457 visas must also invest in training local workers as well.

Ms Kearney said the recommendation to lower English standards for 457 visa holders will see foreign workers more easily exploited and increases the risk of injuries and deaths at work.

“If workers can’t read safety standards and procedures then their lives and their colleague’s lives are being put at risk.”

Ms Kearney said unions support multiculturalism and permanent skilled migration over the use of temporary migration schemes.

“The Government must use this as an opportunity to strengthen the 457 visa scheme, not water it down even further.

The ACTU along with resource, health and service sector unions have renewed their call for a Senate Inquiry into the 457 visa program to ensure it is a transparent and regulated system that puts local jobs and training first.

Key facts on 457 visa program:

- There were 108,870 457 visa holders in Australia at June 2014. This is a 0.8% increase from the previous year despite the rise in unemployment
- The number of 457 visa application rejections increased from 9.8% to 19.1% in occupations where labour market testing has been introduced, while the rejection rate has remained the same in occupations not subject to labour market testing
- Before labour market testing was introduced – the number of 457 visa applications increased by 33.4% in 2011-12 compared to the previous year, while at the same time the number of people out of work increased by 40,000 with unemployment jumping from 4.9% to 5.2%

Media contact: Kara Douglas, 0418 793 885