

Question on Notice
No. 398
Asked on 13 March 2008

MR CHOI asked the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry (MS BOYLE) —

QUESTION:

With reference to skill shortages in regional Queensland—

What initiative has she deployed to relieve this pressure with seniors in our State?

ANSWER:

The Bligh Government is committed to tackling the challenge of skills shortages. As the Minister responsible for regional development and industry in Queensland I am determined to ensure that our industries remain strong to employ future generations of Queenslanders.

I am working closely with my cabinet colleagues to seek out innovative ways to tackle the skills shortage. I am also using our good relationship with the Federal Government to appeal to get the working holiday visa conditions reviewed to remove the age barrier on skilled international visitors. The current conditions stipulate that working tourists must be aged between 18 and 30. Given the urgent need for labour in our State, international workers may provide a temporary option to fill gaps and I have approached the Federal Immigration Minister in relation to providing greater flexibility and lifting age barriers so that older visitors can also work during their visit to Queensland.

The Queensland Government is also using the popularity of caravanning holidays amongst senior travellers to help ease skill shortages in regional Queensland.

It is estimated that 913,000 visitors stayed in a Queensland caravan park or camp ground over the past year.

Caravanning grey nomads play an extremely important role in regional Queensland's tourism industry, travelling on average for six months or more during a single trip.

These people are usually recently retired and come from professional or trade backgrounds. We are currently experiencing a particularly high demand for skilled labour in flood affected regions.

It is a great time for grey nomads to use their skills in these areas while also funding their highway adventures.

My portfolio, in collaboration with Caravanning Queensland and the website, www.workaboutaustralia.com.au have worked closely to provide senior travellers with easy access to information on working holidays in Queensland.

According to a Department of Employment and Training-commissioned research report on the potential of this market segment to help address the current skills shortage, 56.7 percent of those interviewed were interested in undertaking paid work of some form while travelling.

The report revealed that retirees were particularly interested in finding paid or volunteer work along major tourist routes such as the Capricorn, Warrego and Matilda Highways.

Travellers are finding skills they have had for years are suddenly in demand in regional towns, turning a stay of weeks into months.

Backpackers have been taking working holidays in Queensland for years so there's no reason why retired Australians can't do the same thing.

I would like to congratulate Caravanning Queensland for their work in providing so many opportunities for regional Queensland.

Caravanning Queensland have worked closely with the Queensland Government to not only grow the industry but help support regional communities.

The new *Caravan and Touring Directory* gives people an easy to use guide to destinations and experiences perfect for a caravanning holiday.

Caravanning Queensland will be hitting the road with the new guide over the next few months visiting various states to encourage retirees to visit and work in regional Queensland.