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## Long overdue changes to 457 Visas will give Australian workers a chance

The ACTU has praised today's changes to the 457 visa program as a long-overdue reform of a system that is being abused by some employers to drive down pay and conditions.

ACTU secretary Dave Oliver said unions had long-standing concerns that the 457 visa system, used to import temporary workers was being over-used by unscrupulous employers at the expense of local workers.

"We do not support 457 visas, and have serious questions about the number being granted in recent years, given the slowdown in the Australian economy, particularly in the construction sector," Mr Oliver said.

"Today's changes are a great start, and will go some way to ensuring that the 457 visa system is only used for situations where no Australian worker can do the job.

"There is a place for skilled migration to address temporary skills shortages.

"However we should not be relying on guest workers when local workers are willing and able to do the job, or using temporary workers as a substitute for training Australians.

"We need legislation that requires employers who want to use 457 visas to make a genuine effort to test the local labour market first, including using the Federal Government's Jobs Board.

"Without real labour market testing, 457 visas are too easy to abuse.

"457 visa-holders rely on their employer for their visa, and for any future move to permanent residency. This means they will not speak up if they are being underpaid or working in unsafe conditions.

"The 457 visa system leads to the exploitation of foreign workers and the loss of opportunities for Australian workers.

"Imported workers must get the same pay and conditions, and the same safety standards as local workers."

The changes announced today include a tougher test to ensure that 457 visas are used to meet a genuine skills shortage, greater resources to monitor employers, and closing loopholes that allow foreign workers to be paid less than market rates.

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