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New 457 visa laws will create more job opportunities for Australians and help protect overseas workers

Laws passed through Federal Parliament will create more local job opportunities and make it harder for employers to exploit workers from overseas, the ACTU said today.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said the laws would ensure employers had to advertise locally before 457 visas were brought in to fill local positions.

"These laws meet the Australian community's expectations that 457 visas should only be used to fill genuine skills shortages," Mr Oliver said.

"They also serve to protect overseas workers from exploitation as they would be satisfying actual skills shortages instead of being used as a short term stop-gap by employers who prefer a vulnerable workforce."

"For business groups to complain that it is too onerous for them to advertise for jobs locally before they hire 457 visas demonstrates how out of touch they are with the rest of the community. Australians who are looking for work should have the opportunity to apply for local jobs."

"The ACTU remains concerned that employers want to use 457 visas, not to fill skills shortages, but to push down wages and conditions."

"It's disappointing the Coalition has opposed this legislation, which will make sure businesses are required to advertise jobs locally before hiring an overseas worker on a 457 visa.

"Workers should be concerned that Tony Abbott has said that 457 visas will be a "mainstay" of the immigration program if he is elected."

"It has been clear for several years now that we need stronger safeguards to make sure 457s are only used for their intended purpose.

"The union movement is concerned that 457 visas can be used to recruit workers who are afraid to speak out about under-payment or other abuses.

"Workers on 457 visas must get the same pay and conditions as local workers and regulators must be given the power and resources to crack down on any employer who misuses 457 visas.

Mr Oliver said the union movement had a strong record of supporting permanent skilled migration and accepted the need for 457 visas in some areas.

"However, we have always said that 457 visas should only be available where companies can show they have tried to recruit local workers, and that a real skills shortage exists. They must not be used to drive down wages and conditions.

"In the long-term we need to focus on training young Australians rather than the quick-fix of importing workers."

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