

The following was provided by the Northern Territory Horticultural Association (NTHC), in its submission to the Productivity Commission on the Annual Review of Regulatory Burdens on Business – Primary Sector in June 2007.

Centrelink Reporting

Australian residents who receive a Centrelink allowance are required to report their employment activities to Centrelink. If Centrelink cannot obtain proof of income from the employee on a Centrelink allowance, they will seek to obtain verification of employment, income information and dates and hours worked from the employer.

This can be cumbersome for farmers to respond too, particularly if the inquiries are several years after the person has been employed.

Growers are deterred from employing Australian residents on Centrelink allowances because there is a high incidence of employees not meeting their Centrelink reporting obligations and the follow up administration for growers is unmanageable.

The following is Centrelink's response to the above submission:

- Centrelink has consulted with the NTHC and organised to have information available for growers through the NTHC website to assist with their reporting obligations. Centrelink representatives have also spoken directly with growers to determine issues being experienced to ascertain how Centrelink could assist reduce the impact of information requests on them, particularly during peak seasonal times.
- Centrelink is mindful of the burden placed on businesses in providing information and has established Centrelink's Business Hotline to assist employers. The Business Hotline provides a national telephone and fax service to make it easier for employers to do business with Centrelink. Calls are answered promptly by specialist staff who understand the needs of employers. The Business Hotline can be contacted on 13 1158 between 8.30 and 7 pm EST, Monday to Friday, by facsimile on 13 2115 or via a secure e-mail link through the Centrelink web site at www.centrelink.gov.au.
- Further, Centrelink also aims to improve existing electronic exchange services, establish appropriate technological models, develop a range of solutions for varying business capabilities (eg. including capabilities for the small business sector), the reduction of red tape and to improve customer services and improved outcomes for customers.

- Centrelink has been working with employers during major events, such as the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, and the 2006 ABS Census, to ensure that customers are aware of their obligations in notifying employment details through the distribution of payslip envelopes, brochures on how to avoid a debt, and articles in various industry type newsletters. Employers have found this particularly useful in assisting to ensure that employees who may be receiving Centrelink payments are aware of their obligations, and in reducing the amount of information requests sent to the employer.