



23 February 2024

Ms Carolyn Tremain
Secretary and Chief Executive
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Email: 9(2)(a) privacy

Dear Carolyn

Assurance Review of the operation of the Accredited Employer Work Visa Scheme

The Assurance Review of the Operation of the Accredited Employer Work Visa Scheme (the Review) has now concluded. The Public Service Commissioner decided to initiate the Review in August last year, in response to concerns regarding the Scheme raised by the Minister of Immigration. At a high level, the concerns related to how the Scheme was being administered by Immigration New Zealand, potentially resulting in opportunities for misuse and exploitation by third parties.

I would like to thank you for the support that you, your senior leaders, and staff gave the Reviewer during this process. As well I acknowledge your agency's co-operation in providing the Reviewer with access to all relevant documents and INZ staff required to complete the Review.

The Review team has made its findings available and you will be aware the Review found that it was reasonable in the post-covid context in mid-2022 to give general instructions 1 & 2 to allow movement across the border. However, the Review also found that INZ should have undertaken more structured risk assessments both before issuing these instructions and when subsequently extending them.

In addition, the Review found that senior Immigration New Zealand leadership did not pay adequate attention to concerns raised by staff and that there was a period of increased immigration risk as it relates to AEWV, between when the first two general instructions were given and when general instruction 5 was introduced.

I am aware that throughout the Review and in response to issues identified, MBIE have made numerous changes to operational settings around AEWV to improve issues with the implementation of the scheme. I also understand there is a range of work underway to: reduce the risk of migrant exploitation through a consolidated risk strategy; improve intelligence gathering and system learning opportunities; as well as reset the relationship between INZ's senior leaders and frontline staff.

Given the Review's findings and acknowledging the improvements you have already made, I am seeking your assurance that you will develop and roll out a comprehensive plan for improvements to INZ's administration of the AEWV scheme. That plan should reflect the findings and recommendations of the report. It is critical that New Zealanders have trust and confidence in the administration of new visa products and that appropriate steps are taken to minimise the risks of harm to vulnerable migrants. Please advise me how you intend to address the recommendations at your earliest opportunity.

I appreciate your personal attention to these matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Baggott', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Heather Baggott
Deputy Public Service Commissioner
Te Pou Turuki mō Te Kawa Mataaho