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Paradise lost for workers

HUNDREDS of successful Work in Paradise applicants have been locked out of Queensland in a failure of the program touted as the saviour of the tourism industry.

Queensland's Work in Paradise scheme was launched in July offering people up to \$1500 to relocate to areas with a shortage of tourism workers.

As of September 29, 2597 applications were received, with 1503 of those approved.

Of approved applicants, 54 per cent will move from outside Queensland, including 26 per cent from NSW and 13 per cent from Victoria.

However, most of the successful applicants from the Covid-ravaged southern states have been locked out of Queensland following the state government's snap border closure on August 25.

A Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport spokesman said successful applicants "do not qualify for specialist worker exemptions" to enter Queensland.

"Applicants to the program are asked to provide their principal home address or where they usually live as an owner, tenant, boarder or with their family," he said.

"If this was in NSW or Victoria, they needed to have already travelled to Queensland and be working in a tourism job before August 25."

Queensland Tourism Industry Council chief executive Daniel Gschwind said the inability of workers to enter the state proved the state needed a path out of the pandemic.

"Even a portion of the people which have been approved are not here," Mr Gschwind said. "That's another reason for us to have a strong interest on when these borders will open. It's not just the visitors that can't get here, it's workers as well," he said.

However, Mr Gschwind said the program could help tackle the worker shortage.

"We need every lever we can to attract more staff into our industry," he said. "It's not the solution to all our problems, but it is worth a try."

Opposition small and family business spokesman Brent Mickelberg said frustrated business owners were "closing their doors for good".

"At a time when small and family businesses are doing everything to survive and keep their staff in a job, the state government's failure to deliver the Work in Paradise scheme is a slap in the face," he said.

Of the 46 per cent of approved applicants from Queensland, almost half moved from the south east.

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