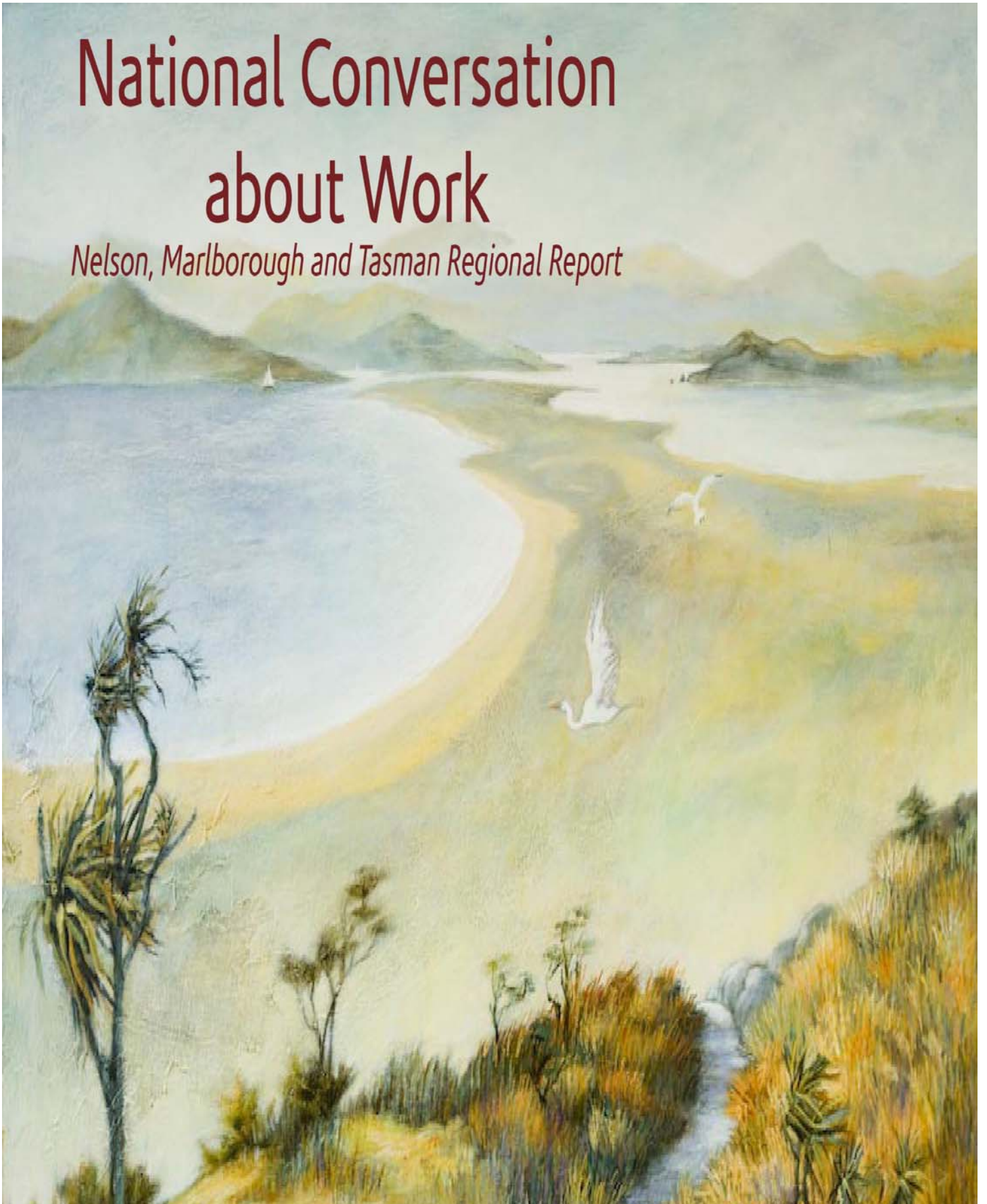


# National Conversation about Work

*Nelson, Marlborough and Tasman Regional Report*



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Cover painting by Dana Rose

## Introduction

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The Nelson /Marlborough/Tasman region is sometimes referred to as the Top of the South and stretches from Farewell Spit across Golden Bay to Nelson City, the Marlborough Sounds and the coastline north of Kaikoura. Inland the area encompasses the Wairau Plains, the Awatere Valley, Main towns include Nelson, Blenheim, Picton, Richmond, Brightwater, Wakefield and Motueka.

The combined population of the three regions is 130,071 according to the latest census. A total of 42,888 people live in the Nelson region; 42,558 live in Marlborough and 44,625 people live in the Tasman region. Ethnically the three regions are less diverse than New Zealand as a whole, with 80.5% of the population of the three regions belonging to the European ethnic group compared with 67.6% for New Zealand as a whole. Māori comprise 8.7% of the population compared to 14.6% for all of New Zealand.

The age profile of the Nelson /Marlborough /Tasman region is older than that of New Zealand as a whole, 14.7% of the population are aged 65 or older, compared to 12.3% of the total population. Marlborough and Nelson have one of the oldest median age structures of any region. In Marlborough in the 10 years to 2006 the number in the 65+ age group grew from 5,466 to 6,876 an increase of 26% and the number in the 45 to 65 year age group increased from 8,613 to 12,252 an increase of 42%. There are fewer young people, aged 15 or under in the region, compared to the national statistics.

The area is known for its pleasant climate and natural beauty. Primary production industries are an important part of the regions' economies with agriculture, viticulture, forestry, commercial fishing and aquaculture all contributing to regional prosperity. The key industries are often referred to as the four Fs: farming, forestry, fruit and fisheries. The region has a long association with arts and culture and many artists and crafts people live in Nelson and Tasman in particular. The Nelson City Council has a forty year history of supporting both community participation in the arts and of supporting and promoting professional artists. With three national parks and four marine reserves, tourism is also an important contributor to the local economy, employing a large

number of people in accommodation, recreation, cafes and restaurants.

## Work

The unemployment rate for the three regions is considerably below the national average. According to Statistics New Zealand regional breakdown QuickStats, the unemployment rate for Nelson is 4.2% and both Tasman and Marlborough have a 2.5% unemployment rate compared to 5.1% nationally.

The labour force participation rate for the year ending March 2009 for Nelson, Marlborough, Tasman and the West Coast was 68.9% compared to the national average of 68.6%. According to the latest census the most common occupational category in both Tasman and Marlborough is labourer and in Nelson, professional. The most common occupational category nation wide is professional.

Nelson is ageing faster than other parts of New Zealand and its median age is higher than the national average. However, Nelson has the lowest number of workers in the 65 plus age group of any region in New Zealand which has prompted the Nelson City Council with the Department of Labour and the Nelson Regional Economic Development Agency to conduct research with a group of Nelson employers and older citizens.

The regions' key industries are significantly seasonal which has a major impact on the nature of employment needs and opportunities according to the Nelson Regional Economic Development Agency. The demand for seasonal labour is most acute for fruit picking during February, March and April with an additional 5,000-6,000 workers needed in the Nelson area.

The average wage in the region is below the national average. Based on the 2006 census the median income for people aged 15 and over was \$23,100 in Nelson, \$23,300 in Marlborough and \$21,600 in Tasman. The median for all New Zealand was \$24,400.

Education levels in the region indicate that in Nelson more of the population have a post-school qualification than the national average and in Tasman and Marlborough the proportion of the population with a post-school qualification is lower than the national average. In Nelson about a quarter of the population have no formal qualification, which equates to the national average,

while in Marlborough and Tasman a greater proportion of the population have no formal qualification than the national average.

## Process of engagement

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The Commission visited Nelson/Marlborough/Tasman in June. At the time of our visit vines were being pruned, apples and kiwifruit were being picked and fish were being caught and processed. Work at the local meat works had finished for the season. The regions' celebrated sunshine was for the most part absent for the week we visited, but for locals it was a week of welcome rain. We did, however, hear frequent reference to "sunshine wages" the idea that people came to live in the three districts for the life style and were prepared to take lesser wages for doing so.

The Commission met with 212 people in 40 different engagements - with employers and/or employees from key regional industries and with a range of local groups who expressed an interest in participating. The Commission is keen to include "new voices" in the National Conversation about Work and so we've also sought meetings with groups not heard from before. The following regional summary report is the outcome of discussions with groups in the Nelson /Marlborough/Tasman region.

Regional reports are being compiled after each regional visit. Participants were given the opportunity to comment on the draft report before publication on the NEON website ([www.neon.org.nz](http://www.neon.org.nz)) and on the project website ([www.haveyoursayaboutwork.org.nz](http://www.haveyoursayaboutwork.org.nz))

The final national report will amalgamate the observations and insights from the sixteen regional reports. It will also incorporate information collected through other forms of engagement such as on-line submissions and meetings of national bodies.

The following groups and individuals were participants in the Nelson/Marlborough/Tasman region:

### Māori Business

- Aotearoa Seafoods
- Sealords

- Whakatu Marae

#### Disabilities groups

- People First
- CCS Action
- Workbridge Nelson

#### Community Groups

- Kahurangi Trust

#### Unions

- Maritime Union New Zealand
- NZEI Education Support Workers
- Public Service Association
- New Zealand Nurses Association

#### Economic Development agencies

- Marlborough Regional Development Trust
- Nelson Regional Economic Development Agency
- Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce

#### Local Government

- Nelson City Council
- Mayor of Nelson, Kerry Marshall
- Manager Community Policy and Planning

#### Wine Industry

- Regional Seasonal Employment (RSE) Contractors Marlborough
- RSE workers Marlborough
- Marlborough Regional Wine Centre
- Neudorf Wines
- Marlborough Wine Industry Representatives

#### Pipfruit industry

- Heywood Orchards, Riwaka
- Compass Fruits Ltd, Richmond
- Thomas Brothers
- Inglis Horticulture Ltd

### Creative Industry

- Nelson Arts Council
- Refinery Gallery
- Eiji Toyokawa (Photographic artist)
- Ross Whitlock (Painter)
- New Zealand (Upper Moutere) Potters Regional Group
- Basil Steele (Photographic artist)
- Duncan Leask (Sculptor)
- Dana Rose (Painter)
- Suzanne Bateup (Textile artist)

### Retail

- Mitre 10 Mega Nelson

### Engineering

- Safe Air Limited

### Food Manufacturing & Processing

- Chairperson New Zealand Farmers Markets

### Private sector

- Fanselow Bell Limited Employment Agency

### Research & other interest groups

- Linda Liddicoat, self employed labour market researcher
- Heather Brownlee, seasonal worker and paid parental leave advocate

### Media engagement

- Marlborough Express
- Fresh FM
- Nelson Mail

The usual format of the meetings was to introduce the project, sometimes by showing the DVD “Making a difference” followed by discussion. Meetings were about one hour long and were usually held in the workplace.

Conversations with employees were structured around the following key questions:

1. What would make a difference for you to achieve equality at work?
2. How would this affect your family?

These questions were followed by a general discussion about equality and fairness at work and what was needed to effect the desired change. Typically these discussions elicited a wealth of personal stories about work, both positive and negative and highlighted a number of issues related to fairness at work.

Conversations with employers focused on key issues which included:

1. What are your most pressing issues related to employment?
2. Do you need assistance to improve EEO in your workplace?
3. What kind of assistance would be most helpful?

We also asked people about the effect of the recession on employment and the labour market in the region.

## **Weathering the recession in Nelson, Marlborough and Tasman**

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According to one Economic Development Agency the recession is impacting on all four of the “F’s” (farming, forestry, fishing and fruit) that make up the backbone of the regions’ economies. Layoffs in forestry and fishing were reported at the time of our visit. The tourism sector is suffering and retail activity is down. The recession has forced employers to focus on efficiency and controlling labour costs. We found new forms of workplace flexibility resulting from efficiency initiatives.

Some employers are redesigning jobs so that they have a more flexible workforce. Employees have a wider range of tasks in their jobs. At one retail store, for example, a concerted effort has been made to train staff so that they are multi-skilled and can more

easily move between departments. This has the added benefit of improving job satisfaction for staff.

However, this approach also had a downside. We heard that there are less jobs available which require a limited number of tasks and that this has a negative impact on the employment of people with disabilities, particularly those people with learning and intellectual disabilities.

“There are more tasks per job, now.” Disability support provider

Employers across the region were receiving a higher number of unsolicited job applications from people who were either overqualified or who had not previously considered work in particular fields. This was especially evident in the wine industry where a number of industry players had indicated an increase in Kiwis wanting work, where previously they had not.

Job losses have also occurred in the public service and we heard that in the seasonal labour market fewer workers are being hired. Work seasons were shorter in a number of industries, such as meat processing which has the effect of reducing household income. A local meat works had a shorter season this year. Normally the season runs from October to May but finished in March.

However, employer attachment to committed and highly skilled employees was evident across industry sectors.

“To survive we have to do what we do very well, I need workers who are ego driven to produce great wine. Now I make choices, if someone is not up to it I won’t re-employ them”

Wine maker

“We have a highly talented workforce that flies a little bit under the radar as far as head office is concerned. We need to work on more publicly celebrating their achievements”

HR Manager, Avionics Company

The threat of job losses has increased insecurity at work. We were told that flexible work practices that were based on goodwill such

as time off to attend appointments or to care for a sick child are less likely to be taken now than in the past. Practices that are formalised in policies and / or mandated in legislation are more robust in the current climate.

**“What’s in law actually matters” union organiser**

The economic downturn has had a more positive impact on seasonal work “churn”.

**“Currently there is greater stability in the existing workforce. A year ago it was 75% turnover and that has dropped to 22%”.**

**Processing plant manager**

A number of people we met told us that reprioritisation by funders, across the public and private sector was having an impact on a number of groups. As the unemployment rate rises, resources and support previously available to assist people on sickness (SB) and invalid benefits (IB) into work are now more likely to be directed at assisting people off the unemployment benefit. Without labour market shortages driving the need for employers to consider employing previously overlooked groups, there is a greater need for resources and support.

**“When there was low unemployment and people were struggling to fill jobs employers were opening their eyes to possibilities in the labour market (of employing people with disabilities). The pressure is off now. The triple bottom line has gone.”**

**Disability support agency**

**“There’s no expectations for people on IBs and SBs to work, so there little or no effort to create pathways into work.”**

**Employment broker**

The impact is being felt not just by people with disabilities. Funding which supports art and craft workers by assisting with marketing and promotion and the business end of creative work appears to be under threat.

“In a recession artists are the first ones to get affected. In the last couple of months sales are lower and some artists are reducing prices. But once you’ve lowered your prices your image is lowered as well. Its hard to get it back up.” Self employed artist

“Grants to the arts go first. The business side of art is really hard. Marketing is difficult. You can’t do it all.” Self employed artist

We were also told that cadetships and apprenticeships were starting to go especially in the private sector.

## Issues

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The following issues were raised by both employees and employers alike. They have been grouped by themes:

- Seasonal employment
- Good employment practices
- The effect of redundancy and unemployment
- Pay equity
- Age demographics
- Non-traditional ways of working
- Union rights
- Educational pathways (to employment and governance)
- Gender issues

## Seasonal employment

### *Recognised Seasonal Employers Scheme (RSEs)*

There is universal support for the RSE scheme amongst the regions’ fruit and wine producers, recognising that labour shortages are a major ongoing issue which is likely to last beyond the current economic downturn. Without RSE workers fruit would go unpicked and vines and trees un-pruned. In Marlborough 1700 RSE workers were required for the 2009 harvest season up from 700 in 2008.

However there appears to be a difference in how the RSE scheme is perceived and practised in sections of the wine industry in Marlborough and in the pip fruit industry in Tasman. The wine

industry and pip fruit industry representatives we met highlighted several areas where practices differed.

“Many seasonal contractors took a responsible attitude to the obligations imposed by the scheme. A small number of others have, unfortunately, exploited the situation to the point where it could be considered a violation of human rights. The adverse publicity of apparent exploitation could seriously affect the reputation of the Marlborough wine product and region in international markets.”

Progress Marlborough Economic Development Strategy 2008

One of the main differences we observed is that in Marlborough RSE contractors are responsible for the hire of labour on behalf of wine growers and producers, whereas in Tasman, growers and producers themselves are responsible for the hire of overseas labour.

Representatives from Wine Marlborough and RSE contractors we met put the percentage of poor contractors at 70% with only 30% of them regarded as good.

They agreed that rogue operators had harmed the reputation of seasonal work in the area and that registration of RSE contractors would go some way towards tidying up employment practices in the industry. According to the Wine Marlborough Seasonal Coordinator, “if everyone signed up to be registered, we could monitor employers and employment practices”. One RSE contractor said, “I would agree that registration would be a good thing”.

Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ) has produced “best practice” models for the wine industry with the intention to incorporate socially responsible employment practices ensuring companies operate with a goal of improving their operations. A new labour component has been added to SWNZ’s advice recognising the need for members to meet their legal employment obligations, which includes having Contractors being accredited members of a contractors association, and a further requirement for members to recognise their social and community commitments.

Opinion within the industry however remains divided as to who should be taking responsibility for and be accountable for industry specific employment practice. There are those who believe the industry should be responsible and those who felt responsibility lay with central government and agencies.

### NiVan Workers Story

One RSE Contractor in Blenheim introduced us to a group of workers from Vanuatu, known as NiVans. They lived in a motel that had been leased for accommodation purposes. A NiVan group leader facilitated our discussion with a wider group of twenty five men and women.

In that discussion we learned:

- NiVan employees were keen to work in New Zealand
- Most workers wanted to do well and be able to return for subsequent seasons
- Workers earnings were returned to Vanuatu to help families and communities
- That workers had no written contract prior to arriving in New Zealand
- The workers felt they had little to do in their spare time and because they lacked the ability to drive in New Zealand this limited recreational possibilities.
- Rents had increased from \$100 (2008) to \$120 (2009) and workers said they were not aware of the increase prior to arriving in New Zealand
- There was no negotiation of terms and conditions prior to or upon arriving in New Zealand
- Returning workers felt they were better accepted by Blenheim and Marlborough this year. Some workers felt unsupported by the community. One person said "50% like us, the other 50% don't care"
- There was a perception of low level intimidation by Police and others in the community
- There were no drivers so transport was limited and a problem for most.
- A high proportion of workers wanted to return next season and were keen for the 2009 season to last as long as possible.
- Workers were glad to be in New Zealand and to be earning dollars to send home to their families and communities.
- All the workers found the New Zealand winter difficult.

### *Pastoral Care*

It became apparent in discussion with migrant seasonal workers themselves and employers, of the importance of pastoral care to assist workers to cope with life and work in New Zealand. We heard several accounts of best practice in relation to pastoral care. Education and mentoring about everyday living skills was a feature of one RSE contractor in Marlborough whose wife spent several weeks orienting new workers, including taking them to the supermarket.

On considering accommodation facilities for workers the same contractor commented, "If I wouldn't live there, I wouldn't expect my seasonal workers to." Another contractor accommodated his workers in a rented hotel and about 8 houses around Blenheim. He said some seasonal workers did not respect the properties they lived in which increased costs. Induction was required around New Zealand accommodation patterns and standard of living.

Pastoral care including accommodation took on a different slant in Tasman with the pip fruit industry. All those we met spoke of longer term and more established practices for their overseas workers. One employer, when recruiting workers from the Pacific, identified the goals and aspirations of his employees and sought to meet them. For example, the workers aspired to provide a good education for their children and so at the end of the season a container load of school equipment and education materials were sent back to the home island and in a few months members from the business would travel to Tonga to help finish construction of a kindergarten.

Another practice we heard about was support for leisure activities; supporting employees' involvement with choirs, touch rugby, church attendance, seafood gathering and assistance with transport to appointments.

At the time of our visit, Rural Women New Zealand issued a press release expressing their concern at the lack of support for migrant workers to integrate into rural communities. We heard of positive stories where communities had, after some time for adjustment, come to the party and supported their new arrivals. In Motueka, seasonal workers from Tonga sang in a choir at a retirement home and eventually combined with the local municipal band.

Instruments were exchanged between choir and band members and a harmonious relationship ensued.

“These immigrants arrive in rural areas and have everyday needs to be met such as medical, dental, educational and access to service providers. They have to find the local supermarket and where to purchase clothing and furniture.” “It is important that new members of the community can participate in social and sporting groups to meet local people and to develop a feeling of belonging.”  
Rural Women New Zealand

### *Changing nature of seasonal work*

Despite the recession the region’s main industries need seasonal labour. We were told that the combination of low pay and seasonal nature of available work means New Zealanders prefer full time permanent all year round employment and so are reluctant to take on this work. It was suggested that rising unemployment may change that.

The historical pattern of the seasonal workforce being made up in part of secondary income earners in a householder (ie housewives) working for a few months a year to earn money for the family holidays is no longer the case.

The precarious income from seasonal work also has an impact on family life.

“Because the season was shorter some of the guys had to leave their families and go and work at Kokiri on the West Coast. It’s really hard for them.” Seasonal worker

Both wine and pip fruit industry commentators spoke of the impact of mechanisation on seasonal work. While increased technological advances will lower labour costs there is a general consensus from both industries of the need for ongoing overseas labour.

One seasonal worker told us that changes to labour requirements, specifically the closure of the night shift at the Sealords plant, meant that workers could no longer move from one seasonal job to another, to retain continuous attachment to the labour force.

### *Seasonal workers and paid parental leave*

Under current paid parental leave (PPL) legislation, eligibility is determined by continuous employment with the same employer for six months, six weeks prior to the birth of the child. Seasonal workers are disadvantaged by this requirement and many are not eligible, even if they are continuously employed (but by different employers) prior to giving birth.

“I was working 50 hours a week in seasonal work and used to go from job to job through the year. If I’d been pregnant at the start of the season I’d have got it (PPL).” “I helped another woman to apply for paid parental leave and she had no problems getting it, because she got pregnant at the right time.”

Seasonal worker

## **Good Employment Practices**

### *Job satisfaction*

As in other regions we learned that almost all people like their jobs and that most employers realised their employees were their most important asset.

We heard of many examples where employees gained great satisfaction from their roles. At Sealords workers enjoyed benefits such as high wages, in comparison to other industry employers; a good superannuation scheme, excellent staff facilities and amenities and almost all staff we spoke to named their relationships with work colleagues as the most satisfying thing about work.

At Mitre10 Mega, staff enjoyed the great team atmosphere, receiving clear and regular updates from their manager and the opportunities that are provided for multi-skilling.

“I’m happy at work. People I work with are good to me”  
Part time worker and member of People First.

### *Workplace communication*

The importance of clear communication in times of uncertainty is paramount to ensuring that employees are kept informed, feel included and understand what is happening within their business.

This helps to alleviate workplace rumour and unease about job security.

The Manager of one particular retail outlet gives a “State of the Nation” address to his staff every 6 weeks, providing them with information about how well the business is doing and any likely issues on the horizon. Similarly one independent wine maker deals with staff openly in forums where he can answer queries which ensure he is kept accountable by his staff.

In both the pip fruit and wine industries, employers are increasingly using social networking and international traveller’s sites to introduce newcomers to employment opportunities and to stay in touch with returning overseas and vintage workers.

The Chairman of the Marlborough Chamber of Commerce suggests that there is need for greater industry cooperation and intersectoral communication so that those involved could “appreciate all of the opportunities that existed between industries” in the region.

### *Flexible work*

Flexible work arrangements continue to be seen as positive by most employees and employers. One employer told us she preferred to give her staff leeway to work flexibly and to achieve results as they could. She said, “We have a lot of give and take. I’m interested in the results rather than having bums on seats at certain times.”

An employee we spoke to reported, “Flexibility is huge for me. I’ve been home with sick children and am fully resourced to do my job when at home.”

In contrast an employment broker in the region believed that flexible work arrangements were not an option for those looking for temporary or part-time roles “as employers want someone now and for set times and set periods”.

One employer had spoken to his staff about a voluntary reduction in work hours as a way to weather the recession and avoid wholesale staff cutbacks. Employees who could see the benefits of this and who wanted to had reduced their hours. As a consequence the employer reduced the company’s work expenses

by almost 600 hours. The voluntary reduction in hours would be reviewed in 3 to 4 months, with a view to hours being increased again in the future.

At Aotearoa Seafoods flexible work practices stem from Māori concepts of family and belonging that underpin its employment practices. The Human Resources Manager told us that “From day one people are made to feel welcome, they know they can contribute and the point of difference for us is how we treat each other”. Māori concepts of whanau (family), manaaki (caring) and tautoko (support) were seen as integral to harmonious relations at work.

## **The effect of redundancy and unemployment**

During our visit we were struck by the vulnerability of provincial New Zealand to layoffs in dominant industries. The loss of several hundred jobs from one company or one industry in smaller centres has a much more significant impact on the whole community than is the case in urban New Zealand. In situations where large employers employ several generations, families often have the same employer and a company closure puts all the income earners of a family out of work. Secondly, the primary industry of a town is supported by a number of service industries or businesses, so job losses have a ripple effect throughout the community. And thirdly, alternative work is harder to come by and so people either start to move away or struggle to make ends meet on a benefit.

The lack of wider community awareness and subsequent planning about the potential for major company layoffs is an issue in the regions. In particular the impact of a potential closure of Sealords and the effects this would have on the labour force and community in Nelson needs a proactive response from all concerned agencies.

## **Pay equity**

Our visit to Nelson/Marlborough/Tasman coincided with the celebration of the annual national Support Staff in Schools day and also the announcement of a zero pay offer to education support staff. Prior to the offer one group in this predominantly female workforce had been the subject of a nationwide pay investigation

which concluded that special education support staff who work with special needs children were very low paid, with many earning just slightly above the minimum wage.

They are significantly underpaid in terms of their skills, responsibilities and the demands of their jobs. \$7.57 less at the lower end of the pay scale and \$4.07 less at the upper end of the pay scale than equivalent male dominated jobs. Furthermore the pay and employment equity report on the compulsory school sector which covered the rest of the group had not been released by the Government and a recommended pay investigation for school support staff had been cancelled.

The support staff we spoke to were incensed, particularly because money had been put aside in the budget to give caretakers and cleaners (another group of low paid education workforce) a backdated pay rise.

“I don’t begrudge cleaners and caretakers a pay rise, but the unfairness is blatant. A cleaner earns more vacuuming than a Teacher’s Aid who tube-feeds and catheterises a student.”  
Education Support Staff worker

“My son works at a petrol station for more pay than caregivers, with fewer responsibilities and no poos.” Union organiser

A pay and employment equity issue raised by a group of disabled people was the issue of reduced payment when work is done at a slower rate.

“If wages are based on an hourly rate, how do I quantify my output? Whose responsibility is it to say my job is bigger than I’m being paid for?” Worker with a disability

In Nelson we talked to workers who worked longer hours than they were paid for, because the nature of their disability meant it took longer to get the job done. The questions raised were: how do ensure fairness in those circumstances? And how is income adequacy assured? One disabled person said that she was able to maintain the pace expected of a new employee, but she was unable to meet the expectation that this pace would accelerate

with experience. Her experience was that she would then have her hours reduced (with consequent loss of pay).

A more equitable and dignified mechanism than minimum wage exemptions would be for employers to receive funding from agencies such as Workbridge to support the employment of people with disabilities when necessary.

The disability groups we talked to also discussed difficulties they experienced in accessing employment. They said they were really keen to work but that once prospective employers knew they had a disability they did not receive a job offer. This was attributed to both discrimination and a lack of suitable jobs.

Permanent part time work was very difficult to find in the area. This was raised by both people with disabilities for whom management of fatigue and physical demand was an important factor, by artists who were seeking a steady income to smooth out the fluctuating income from their art, and parents who wanted to have time available to care for their children.

Pay equity between regions was also raised several times. The frequently mentioned “sunshine wages” refers to lower pay rates than other regions coupled with a relatively high cost of living which has been driven by the high cost of housing in the area.

“In Nelson retail workers get paid \$13 to \$13.50 an hour and if they were in a bigger city they’d get closer to \$17.00 an hour. But the cost of living is comparable.” “How do people live on that?”

Union organiser

“The concept of “sunshine wages” is not supported by the majority of employers across industries, and most have recognised the need to offer at least equitable remuneration along with generous employment conditions, career development opportunities, training and development.”

Nelson Regional Workforce Development Strategy 2008 -2009

At the time of our visit the dispute between Sealords and the Service and Food Workers Union had gone to mediation. While not wishing to enter into debate about the rights and wrongs of what is clearly a complex dispute with very high stakes we note that one of

the sticking points is the proposal to start new employees on lower rates than current workers. According to the Nelson Mail most of the \$1.8 million savings being sought by Sealords could be achieved without reducing base pay rates for current workers, though it wants to start new employees on lower rates. The potential inequity of people doing the same job paid at different rates according to when they were first hired was raised with Sealords.

## Age Demographics

The demographics of Nelson/ Marlborough/Tasman make the ageing of the workforce a significant future challenge. A Marlborough avionics company with 360 fulltime employees including large numbers of technical experts said a third of the workforce was over 55 years of age. This signalled a need to manage wellness, retirement and future labour supply issues with managers, unions and workers.

“People also need to have choices and need to understand that they don’t need to work until they die.” HR manager

The company did employ several apprentices who combined work-based training with study at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology. One of the apprentices said the ability to work across specialised areas in avionics, not just in “planes”, and receive broad based training was appreciated.

“While I’m not saying I’ll stay here until I die I want to stay on after my apprenticeship finishes.” Apprentice Avionics Industry

Managers at a seafood processing plant said they needed a system of cross training to manage older employees which allowed them to step down from high pressure areas of work where speed was required.

Employers in the pip-fruit industry also told us that fruit picking was physically hard work and that some older workers cannot physically do the work.

The retention of young people in the Marlborough area was nominated by the chair of the Marlborough Development Trust as

the most significant challenge the area faced. There has been a decline in the 0-9 year age group but increases in the 10 -19 year old cohort in the last decade. A number of factors contributed to the loss of young people. Traditionally young people left the region for university study. Vineyard jobs were seen by some young people as “dead end” jobs and there were a limited number of public service jobs in the region because the majority of government agencies were located in Nelson.

“Along with other provincial areas, there is a problem regarding retention of young people in the region and their subsequent absorption into the workforce. Many leave the region for study or for employment and career training options available outside Marlborough.”

Progress Marlborough Economic Development Strategy 2008

## Non-traditional ways of working

During our visit to Nelson/Marlborough/Tasman we took the opportunity to talk to artists and crafts people about their work life. A number of the artists we spoke to earn their living partly from their art directly and partly from other sources. For most, deriving an income from sale of their art was precarious and insufficient to live on. Some received income support through the benefit system. Fluctuating benefit abatement as a result of income generated from the sale of art required careful record keeping. It became apparent that a relationship with a case manager rather than working with different people in a call centre was a much less frustrating way of managing variable income and benefit levels.

Other artists we spoke to also worked as art teachers and art administrators. Some noted a downturn in sales as a result of the recession and the downturn in tourist numbers in the region.

Those artists and crafts people who made a living solely from their art planned for ebbs and flows in their income, with the winter months being lean financially.

“It’s quiet in winter. You have to put your beans away for the spring. It can be quite tricky.” Self employed potter

Methods of managing the balance between work and life varied. For a number of the artists there is no distinction between work and life, whereas for others boundaries are created by working from a studio away from home, or by making a conscious decision to take time away from work.

“I go to and from work sixty times a day”. Self employed potter

“I walk to work each day (from the house out to the studio) and I take weekends off. “ Self employed potter

Almost all the artists talked about the importance of business skills - and in particular marketing - in making a living as an artist. Several said that marketing and creating their art were very different skill sets and that support and guidance for the business and marketing aspect of art was vital for economic viability. Funding for arts marketing and business support came from a variety of sources, from the city council, from government (in particular the PACE programme) and from collective groups of artists. This funding was precarious, especially in the current climate.

“The visual artist’s work and the running of a business are at opposite ends of the corridor – requiring very different skills and mindsets. Therefore, the self employed artist needs help in marketing” Self employed artist

People with disabilities are another group who work in a non-traditional form. People with learning difficulties and intellectual impairments that we met typically worked part time, attended a local polytechnic studying various topics of interest to them, and participated in community activities. One young woman who was finding it difficult to secure paid employment also did voluntary work which was the highlight of her week.

“I like keeping busy, not staying at home looking at four walls.”  
Part time worker member of People First.

Part time work is often supplemented by benefits. For some benefit abatement regimes are a barrier to employment. People who were married were not eligible for benefits and to the support services that come with being on a benefit.

“The decision was practically made for me that I won’t work”. “It’s a constant struggle to make ends meet. I can’t wait until I’m 65.”  
Person with a disability, invalid beneficiary

The President of the New Zealand Farmers Market Association in Marlborough said that many local producers and sellers were able to make a “real living” from selling their produce at market. In New Zealand there are almost 1200 food producers selling at 42 farmers markets with most earning anywhere between \$200-\$3000 per week. Farmers markets were seen by some as a stepping stone to bigger things. Examples abound of small producers, such as an organic producer in Marlborough leveraging farmer market networks to expand production.

## Union Rights

The right of union officials to enter workplaces was being obstructed in a number of worksites in the region, despite union access being a right under the Employment Relations Act. Gaining access by naming an individual was risky to the worker involved because if the worker was seen talking to a union official they were then vulnerable to harassment. Some workers in some sites in the region were afraid to speak out on issues such as health and safety and other conditions of work and discouraged from joining a union.

## Educational pathways (to employment & governance)

Several employers had initiatives that provided innovative pathways either into employment, within employment or into governance roles. These examples of best practice could be followed in other regions.

The Pathways to Art and Culture Employment programme has helped a number of local artists into sustainable employment. The programme provides a limited number of artists with a structured employment pathway. Assistance includes work space, business and artistic mentors and financial support. A frequent theme from artists we spoke to was the need for business skills.

One seafood processing business offered internships and working holiday initiatives as well as providing tertiary scholarships. The company already had 27 alumni from its scholarship initiative.

### Associate Directorships

Aotearoa Seafoods owned by Wakatu Incorporated has introduced an innovative Associate Directorship programme as a means to provide pathways to governance roles for recipients.

Nominations are received from within the wider whanau for Associate Director roles. Applicants must be whanau and under the age of 40 years. Nominees are appointed for a 2 year period and receive some monetary reward or fees. In the first year, nominees are appointed to sector boards within Wakatu Inc. In the second year they are appointed to the head Wakatu board.

All Associate Directors can contribute and have the right of reply in board meetings and at table discussions: They do not however, have voting rights during their tenure as Associate Directors.

The scheme is successful with one recent female Associate Director being appointed as a full Director to a company board.

In the Marlborough wine industry one independent winemaker offers a unique internal scholarship. The recipient is offered an opportunity to produce 1000 litres of his or her own wine, which is hugely rewarding for anyone starting out in the wine industry.

Concern about the disproportionate suspension and stand down rates for Māori students as well as the relatively low rate of Māori students staying on at school (a national problem which is noted by the Education Review Office as an issue in several Nelson secondary schools) prompted Whakatu Marae to initiate Wonderful Wahine, a programme to support and encourage young Māori girls to stay at school and to develop the confidence to aspire to further education and to careers.

The programme involves staff at the school and the marae working together to keep rangatahi in school. A Māori teacher and school counsellors supported by the principal work with Whakatu marae to reduce truancy and drop out rates. One innovation was to

change break times in order to limit the opportunities for leaving the school (and not returning) during the day.

Another Wonderful Wahine initiative is an annual hui for all Year 9 and 10 Māori girls at the school. Analysis of drop out patterns suggested that the first two years were critical in establishing a positive engagement with the school. However, this programme does not just target at risk Māori girls but all Māori girls at Nelson Girls College. The marae was keen to establish an ongoing relationship with the school. The kaupapa of the marae is to provide a positive service rather than fix deficits, said Pouwhakahaere Trevor Wilson.

Attendance at the day long hui is voluntary. Girls work together on various activities such as weaving, poi making, hip-hop and pampering activities at the same time as discussing aspirations, careers, school experiences and health. Older women are also present.

“Having kuia and aunties there changes the tempo, the attitude of rangatahi changes with older people in the room.”

Carolina Hippolite, Kaimahi Hauora

Many of the sessions are led by young women not much older than the girls and those with skills help others. The learning model is tuakana teina, “it’s old school” says Carolina. “It’s about learning from one another, the young from the old and the old from the young”. The drop off rate in Year 10 has halved said Carolina.

The announcement of cuts to funding for community education coincided with our visit. Enrolment and participation in so called hobby classes was often the first step for adult learners to re-engage with education according to several interviewees. Learners in these classes gained confidence in their ability to learn and then went on to take other classes which furthered their employment choices and prospects. The point was also made that the cuts appeared to be trivialising subjects (such as art) that were in fact an important contributor to community integration and cohesion and individual well-being.

## Gender issues

Attitudes towards gender occupational segregation came up at one place of work within the engineering sector. A female employee identified a culture of not liking women in engineering roles and thought this to be a generational factor. Some fellow male colleagues liked to “keep women in boxes”, she said. She was adamant, however, that her female colleagues were not constrained by these attitudes.

“We [women] give them [men] a rev up! They can’t keep us in a box”.  
Female engineer

The representation of women in senior management and governance roles varied considerably, with a woman at the top of an avionics company on one hand, but only three woman (out of 25) in governance and senior management positions at a major processing plant where the majority of employees were female.

At Aotearoa Seafoods “wahine are very vocal behind the scenes”. According to the HR Manager “the aunties make all the decisions. There may be a man sitting in the seat at the (board) table but 6 aunties read the papers and are telling him what to do”.

A number of employers ensure that they put the right mix of people in work groups to ensure harmonious workplaces. For some, this meant ensuring men and women are working together. The manager of a pip-fruit orchard told us that he didn’t want male-only work gangs. “It’s hopeless” he said. For others, getting the ethnic mix right in work gangs was important.

## Conclusions

Many of the people we talked to in the three regions had a different working life than the standard eight hour day, Monday to Friday year round desk job. Some worked long hours part of the year, others worked part of the week all year. Quite a few had more than one occupation.

Many of the employers in the area rely on migrant labour, either through the RSE scheme or direct employment. We noticed considerable variation in the employment practices related to migrant workers.

Responses to the recession are changing the nature of employment. Varying forms of flexible work, including job redesign are being tried.

Working people continue to tell us how much they enjoy their jobs. This is not prompted by job insecurity in recessionary times, but by a genuine pleasure in a job well done, workplace camaraderie and a sense of being valued as well as material rewards.

Smaller communities are extremely vulnerable to the economic and social consequences of large scale layoffs from significant employers. The role of the wider community and their agents (such as local government, regional branches of central government, NGOs and economic development agencies) in either preventing or mitigating the damage of significant job losses needs to be explored.

It is not the role of the Commission to intervene in employer–union negotiation or to question the need for business imperatives and profit-making. However, a whole of community approach to maintaining employment, co-ordinated by economic development agencies is in New Zealand's interests.

## Recommendations

- Extension of paid parental leave to seasonal workers with continuous attachment to the workforce (as opposed to specific employer).
- Identified need for compulsory registration of contract labour employers in Marlborough bringing Pacific workers in under the RSE scheme.
- Need for Department of Labour to have an office in Marlborough until pastoral care and accountability issues have been resolved in the RSE scheme in the industry.
- Development of a whole of community approach by Economic Development Agencies to threatened layoffs in the community.
- Promotion of good ideas: Wonderful Wahine; Development of governance skills through associate directorships; Career development initiatives like encouragement to make the wine of choice.