

The Hon Alan Tudge MP
Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship,
Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

CC. Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Via email: senator.fierravanti-wells@aph.gov.au

02 April 2020

Dear Minister

EXTENSIONS TO EXPIRED/EXPIRING VISAS

As representatives of the Italian community in Australia*, we are writing to express our community's support of measures to redress potential visa compliance difficulties due to the coronavirus emergency.

We are particularly concerned for two groups of visa holders.

The first group comprises individuals holding tourist or other temporary visas who are prevented from returning to Italy because of travel restrictions, unavailability of flights and, in some cases, health related reasons. We are aware of many temporary visa holders with confirmed flights to return Italy before their visas' expiry who are stranded in Australia because of flight cancellations and unavailability of alternative flights. Most are facing the prospect of unintended visa expiry; in some cases, the visa may have already expired. These are people whose travel plans were fully compliant with the conditions of their visas, but are now caught up in a situation not of their own making over which they have no personal control.

We are aware of the existing procedures to remedy or forestall unintended non-compliance with visa conditions. However, while we agree they are appropriate and apt in normal circumstances, we would strongly argue that, in the current circumstances, they are a cause of deep anxiety and distress for those inadvertently at risk of breaching the conditions of their visas.

We firmly believe that a simple procedure should be introduced to extend the visa validity of people who have been stranded in Australia because of the current emergency. Rather than requiring **stranded individual visa holders** to follow standard visa extension procedure, we strongly suggest that it would be more expedient to rectify potential breaches with the grant of an automatic and universal extension to all those holding visas that were still valid when Australia's emergency response to the pandemic were introduced at the end of February 2020. Such a measure would be similar to visa extensions introduced by several countries to assist stranded foreigners, including Australians, unable to return home because of travel restrictions and cancelled flights.

The second group requiring special consideration principally comprises individuals holding a temporary work visa (482 and 457), a working holiday visa or a student visa. Many of those with a 482 (or 457) visa were employed in service industries (restaurants, tourism and hospitality) that have been closed because of coronavirus containment measures. Consequently, unless they are able to secure another sponsor for the remaining period of their work contract within the 60 day prescribed time, — an extremely difficult task in the current circumstances — they could be at risk of breaching their visa conditions. In such an eventuality, we strongly recommend they be accorded sympathetic treatment to allow them to remain in Australia and be available to support the post-emergency economic recovery.

Working holiday visa and student visa holders that make up a large proportion of the workforce in hospitality and catering services and seasonal workers in the horticulture sector are also disproportionately affected by coronavirus related unemployment and business closures. Without significant alternative means of support these people are at risk of becoming destitute. Should they choose to ride out the crisis by returning to their home country for the period of the crisis (travel restrictions and availability of flights permitting) they run the risk of not being able to return to Australia. We believe that they too deserve sympathetic treatment by way of welfare support and visa extensions for a period equivalent to the duration of the emergency.

Overall, we strongly urge the Government to undertake an urgent review of all temporary migration visa streams to evaluate the likely impact of the crisis and develop appropriate welfare assistance benefits to sustain those affected in this period of need.

Dear Minister, we thank you for your consideration, and hope you will be able to act urgently to provide some appropriate relief to ease the plight of workers with temporary visas who have been caught up in unfortunate circumstances not of their making.

Yours sincerely



On behalf of:

Franco Papandrea, General Council of Italians Abroad member for Australia and New Zealand
Vittorio Petriconi, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Western Australian
Francesco Pascalis, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Victoria & Tasmania
Maurizio Aloisi, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of New South Wales
Mariangela Stagnitti, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Queensland & Northern Territory
Christian Verdicchio, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of South Australia
Francesco Barilaro, President, Committee of Italians Abroad, Australian Capital Territory

**We are elected volunteers who represent the Italian community in Australia on consultative bodies established by Italian laws.*

The General Council of Italians Abroad (Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero – CGIE) is a

consultative and advisory body to the Italian Parliament and Government on all matters concerning Italians abroad. The members of the Council are elected by an electoral college comprising all members of Committees of Italians Abroad and delegates of Italian community associations in a country.

Committee of Italians Abroad (Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero – Com.It.Es.) are consultative and advisory bodies established in Italian Consular districts abroad. Each Comites in Australia has 12 members who are elected by universal suffrage of Italians residing in the district. The elected membership is augmented with co-opted members designated by Italian community associations operating in the district.