



Office of the Mayor

**SUBMISSION TO:
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

February 15, 2026

**Re: Urgent Need for Federal Action on Temporary Foreign Worker Permit
Extensions in Rural Communities**

The Crisis

Sechelt, on the Sunshine Coast of BC, has an immediate workforce crisis that threatens our community's economic viability and social fabric. Current federal Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) policies will force approximately 300 international workers and their families to leave our region in 2026—with 150 departing by June 30, 2026 and another 150 by December 31, 2026. This is catastrophic for a community with **zero unemployment** and no local labour pool to replace them.

Our Unique Rural Reality

While Sechelt is only 37 kilometres from Metro Vancouver, we are accessible solely by BC Ferries—requiring two hours travel, at least, each way at substantial cost since public transit is not prevalent here.

Our demographics compound this challenge. With a median age exceeding 57 years (compared to BC's 43-year average), we are among Canada's oldest communities. We simply do not have sufficient working-age residents to meet labour demands. Statistics and government agencies confirm we have approximately 200 employable persons in a population of 32,000—representing full employment in practical terms.

Documented Impact

A January 2026 survey of employers on the Sunshine Coast reveals the severity:

- One-third of responding employers rely on TFWs because positions cannot be filled locally
- 58% of recruiting employers have been unable to fill vacant positions in the past year
- Wages range from \$17.85 to \$39 per hour, with most positions paying \$22-\$26 per hour—well above minimum wage of \$17.85.
- Critical shortages span all sectors: childcare, healthcare, food service, trades, banking, first responders, veterinary care, IT, transportation, retail and more.

Contacts - +1 604 885 1986, Henderson@Sechelt.ca

Several businesses have already reduced operating hours and owners and their families are working more hours to try to survive. This is unsustainable and some will close permanently if workers are forced to leave.

The human cost is equally severe—TFWs and their families face extreme anxiety and uncertainty, employers stand to lose trained staff that cannot be replaced, other employees are anxious because they face having more workload or losing their jobs and consumers face the reality that Sechelt's services and amenities will be significantly reduced.

Why Federal Policy is Failing Rural Canada

Current immigration policies apply a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores rural realities. Urban centres may have pools of unemployed workers; rural communities do not. The recently announced policy allowing some TFW permit renewals but not extending spouses and children is particularly harmful, as it forces families apart or compels entire households to leave despite community need.

Caps on TFWs employees are counterproductive when **no local candidates exist**. Our employers have exhausted recruitment efforts across BC and Canada with minimal success. They hire 100% of qualified local applicants—there simply are not enough.

What Rural Communities Need

In September 2025, a group of local employers and I travelled to Ottawa to advocate for specific, urgent measures:

1. **Immediate extension** of all existing work permits—for TFWs, spouses, and dependents—through December 31, 2027, to provide stability while longer-term solutions are developed
2. **Expedited approval** for new TFW applications, with priority for rural communities facing documented labour shortages
3. **Elimination of employer caps** on TFW percentages in regions with demonstrated very low unemployment
4. **Clear pathway to Permanent Residence** for current TFW families by July 1, 2026, with conditions requiring five years residency in rural communities
5. **Development of a modernized rural immigration program** by December 31, 2026, designed in collaboration with municipalities, provinces, and business organizations
6. **Simplified, expedited application processes** for rural regions, with aggressive enforcement against the small minority who abuse the system

Beyond Sechelt: A National Rural Issue

Our situation is not unique. Communities across rural Canada face identical challenges—aging populations, geographic isolation, full employment, and dependence on international workers to maintain essential services.

#OneSizeDoesNOTfitAll is not merely a slogan; it reflects the policy flexibility rural Canada requires to survive.

Conclusion

When we visited Ottawa in September, we were comforted that the urgent need for changes in the immigration system was understood and that such were part of the forthcoming budget. Unfortunately, it is five months later, and we have received no details of how these will help our community.

In the meantime, the Sunshine Coast and similar rural communities face economic and social collapse. These are not abstract concepts — families are being forced to make life altering decisions, businesses are facing having to close, services will be eliminated, and communities underserved. The workers we are losing are taxpaying, skilled contributors who have chosen to build their lives in our community. We need them, and they want to stay.

I respectfully urge this Committee to recommend immediate extension of work permits for current TFWs and their families, and the rapid development of immigration policies that recognize and serve rural Canadian realities.

I also request the opportunity to address your committee in the coming weeks. I am planning to come to Ottawa during the week of March 22, 2026 or could attend a Committee meeting earlier, remotely.

Respectfully submitted,



John R Henderson
Mayor

Attachment

cc:

- The Rt. Hon. Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada
- The Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Economic and Social Development Canada
- The Hon. Lean Metlege Diab, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- The Hon. Buckley Belanger, Secretary of State for Rural Development
- MP Patrick Weiler, West Vancouver – Sunshine Coast – Sea to Sky
- Keep Families Together Sunshine Coast
- Various local governments



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Sechelt, BC, January 29, 2025

Sechelt Employers Issue Urgent Call to Federal Government: Lack of Workers Threatens Community Liveability and Prosperity

Several of Sechelt's key employers are sounding the alarm over what they describe as an "immediate and catastrophic" risk to the Sunshine Coast's economic and social wellbeing if federal Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) policies are not immediately revised.

During meetings in Ottawa in September, these employers joined with Sechelt Mayor John R Henderson, to warn federal authorities that hundreds of essential workers will be forced to leave the Sunshine Coast in 2026, due to federal policies. This is a serious situation because the Sunshine Coast has **zero unemployment** - there are no unemployed workers available locally. Losing even a handful of International Workers will lead to reduced hours, cancelled services and in several cases, businesses closing permanently.

"Our community cannot function without these workers," said Mayor Henderson. "The federal government's approach to this is causing needless harm, anxiety and fear in our community. This is beyond an economic issue—it is a human issue. It can be fixed – but only with immediate decisive action by the federal government."

Local employers report they have exhausted every recruitment avenue across BC and Canada. Critical shortages already exist across all sectors including childcare, health care, food service, trades, labour, veterinary care, IT, transportation, home maintenance, retail banking, and first responders. Some businesses have already reduced hours or stopped accepting new clients due to lack of staff.

In a letter to federal ministers in October, Sechelt employers requested immediate action, including:

- **Extend all existing work permits**—for workers, spouses, and dependents—through December 31, 2027.
- **Expedite approval for new TFW applications**, prioritizing rural communities.
- **Remove the cap on TFW per employer**, as employers report no local candidates whatsoever.
- **Provide a clear pathway to Permanent Residence** for TFW families by July 1, 2026.

- **Implement a modernized, simplified rural immigration program** by the end of 2026.

The employers' message is simple: **Without immediate action by the Federal Government, the Sunshine Coast faces a service and economic crisis—one that will affect every resident.**

-30-

Quotes:

"We are past the point of warning signs," said Desmond Das, owner of Daily Roast Coffee House and Shift Kitchen + Bar. "Without immediate action by the federal government, businesses will close, seniors will be left without care, and families who have built their lives here will suffer greatly."

"Every business has a 'We're hiring' sign at their entrance," said Del Sidhu, co-owner of 22 Taphouse. "Even the police detachment is looking for support staff! This is beyond urgent. We are running out of time."

"We are so fortunate that these people chose to live and work in Sechelt because we need them," said Sechelt Mayor John Henderson. "The federal government's lack of action is astonishingly cruel and ignores the harm to everyone on the Sunshine Coast."

#OneSizeDoesNOTfitAll

Contacts:

- On behalf of Employers - Desmond Das – desmonddas@gmail.com
- On behalf of Employees - KeepFamiliesTogetherSC@gmail.com