Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICIAL

DRAFT Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration

Meeting Date:	18 March 2024	**Meeting Time:**	9:30 AM to 12:00 PM
Venue:	Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 – Room 2S2		

Meeting brief

1. You will chair the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration (MACSM).

2. This is the first MACSM meeting with the reformed structure and new membership.

    a. Five MACSM meetings have been scheduled for 2024.
    b. MACSM members have been appointed as representatives of their organisation – previously, members were appointed as individuals.

3. This meeting provides an opportunity to:

    a. Consult with business and unions on the implementation of Migration Strategy reforms.
    b. Coordinate efforts with Jobs and Skills Australia to implement a new Skills in Demand visa, particularly the development of a Core Skills Pathway.
    c. Inform agenda items and areas of focus for the newly established MACSM Experts Sub-committee.

4. The MACSM Experts Sub-committee will hold its inaugural meeting on 25 March 2024.

5. Meeting papers were shared with attendees on 12 March 2024 (see Attachment F).

Sensitivities

1. Given timings of Budget submissions, there may be limited time to consult on the Talent and Innovation Migration Strategy reform measure.

Attachments

A. Meeting agenda
B. List of Attendees
C. Biographies
D. Background on agenda items
E. Talking points
F. Background papers distributed to MACSM members

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Attachment A: Meeting agenda

Date: Monday, 18 March 2024, 9:30AM – 12:00PM AEDT

Item		Description	Lead
1.	9:30 – 9:40	**Welcome and opening remarks**	Minister Giles
		• Introductions and update from the Chair	
2.	9:40 – 10:00	**Update from the Department of Home Affairs**	Michael Willard
		• Recent developments and key priorities	
		• Overview of new MACSM structure and arrangements, including meeting logistics and interactions with other fora	
3.	10:00 – 10:40	**Update from Jobs and Skills Australia**	David Turvey
		• Overview of JSA's key priorities	
		• Migration Strategy implementation, including advice on the Skills in Demand visa occupation list	
		• Discussion and Q&A	
4.	10:40 – 11:30	**Update and discussion on the Migration Strategy**	Michael Willard
		• 2024-25 permanent Migration Program and Multi-year Migration Planning Model	
		• Regional migration	
		• Talent and Innovation visa and Points Test	
5.	11:30 – 11:40	**Introduction from the Expert Sub-committee Chair**	Liz Collett
		• Overview of the role and function of the sub-committee	
		• Agenda items for future meetings	
		• Discussion and Q&A	
6.	11:40 – 11:50	**Other business**	MACSM members
7.	11:50 – 12:00	**Meeting close**	Minister Giles

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Attachment B: List of attendees (as at 15 March)

Organisation	Attendee
MACSM Members	
Commonwealth Government	**The Hon Andrew Giles MP – Chair** Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	s. 47F(1) Chief of Policy and Advocacy *On behalf of* **Andrew McKellar** Chief Executive Officer
Australian Council of Trade Unions	**Michelle O'Neil** President
Australian Industry Group	s. 47F(1) Head of Communications and Government Affairs *On behalf of* **Innes Willox** Chief Executive
Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union	**Steven Murphy** National Secretary
Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union	s. 47F(1) Queensland Branch Assistant Secretary *On behalf of* **Matthew Journeaux** Federal Secretary
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation	**Annie Butler** Federal Secretary
Business Council of Australia	s. 47F(1) Director Skills, Education and Research *On behalf of* **Bran Black** Chief Executive Officer
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	**Melinda Cilento** Chief Executive
Electrical Trades Union	**Michael Wright** National Secretary
National Farmers' Federation	s. 47F(1) General Manager *On behalf of*

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Organisation	Attendee
	Tony Mahar Chief Executive Officer
Regional Australia Institute	s. 47F(1) Director External Affairs *On behalf of* **Liz Ritchie** Chief Executive Officer
Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association	**Gerard Dwyer** National Secretary-Treasurer
Small Business Organisations Australia	**Luke Achterstraat** Chief Executive Officer
United Workers Union	**Timothy Kennedy – APOLOGY** National Secretary
Standing representation	
Jobs and Skills Australia – Commissioner	**David Turvey**
MACSM Expert Sub-Committee – Chair	**Elizabeth (Liz) Collett**
Skilled Migration Officials Group	**Irene Tkalcevic** Director, Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
Department of Home Affairs	**Michael Willard** A/g Deputy Secretary, Immigration
	Tara Cavanagh Group Manager, Immigration Policy
	Paul Denman Assistant Secretary, Immigration Planning and Policy
Guests	
Jobs and Skills Australia	**Cliff Bingham** Acting First Assistant Secretary
MACSM Secretariat	
Department of Home Affairs	s. 22(1)(a)(ii), Director, Immigration Planning and Policy
	s. 22(1)(a)(ii), Assistant Director, Immigration Planning and Policy
	s. 22(1)(a)(ii), Assistant Director, Immigration Planning and Policy
	s. 22(1)(a)(ii), Policy Officer, Immigration Planning and Policy
	s. 22(1)(a)(ii), Policy Officer, Immigration Planning and Policy

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Attachment C: Biographies

Attending MACSM members

Australian Council of Trade Unions	
	**Name**: Ms Michele O'Neil
	Role: President
	Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes
	Former roles: • Vice President, Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union • National Secretary, Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union	
	**Name**: Mr Steven Murphy
	Role: National Secretary
	Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

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Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation



Name: Ms Annie Butler

Role: Federal Secretary

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Committee for Economic Development of Australia



Name: Ms Melinda Cilento

Role: Chief Executive

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Former roles:

- Non-executive Director, Woodside Petroleum
- Commissioner, Productivity Commission
- Deputy Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia

Council of Small Business Organisations Australia



Name: Mr Luke Achterstraat

Role: Chief Executive Officer

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

Former roles:

- NSW Executive Director, Property Council of Australia
- Chair, NSW Expert Housing Advisory Panel

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Electrical Trades Union



Name: Mr Michael Wright

Role: National Secretary

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association



Name: Mr Gerard Dwyer

Role: National Secretary - Treasurer

Member of MACSM 2022-23:

Former roles:

- National President, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association
- Secretary-Treasurer, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association NSW Branch

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Apologies and proxies

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Apology



Name: Mr Andrew McKellar

Role: Chief Executive Officer

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Former roles:

- Secretary General, Federation Internationale de l'Automobile
- Chief Executive, Australian Trucking Association
- Chief Executive, Australian Automobile Association
- Chief Executive, Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries.

Proxy

s. 47F(1)

Name: s. 47F(1)

Role: Chief of Policy and Advocacy

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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Australian Industry Group

Apology



Name: Mr Innes Willox

Role: Chief Executive

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes – Chair

Former roles:

- Australian Consul General to Los Angeles
- Chief of Staff to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer

Proxy

s. 47F(1)

Name: s. 47F(1)

Role: Head of Communications and Government Affairs

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union	
Apology	
	**Name**: Mr Matt Journeaux
	Role: Queensland Branch Secretary
	Member of MACSM 2022-23: No
	Former roles: • Director, Meat Industry Employees' Superannuation Fund
Proxy	
No photo available	**Name**: s. 47F(1)
	Role: Queensland Branch Assistant Secretary
	Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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Business Council of Australia

Apology



Name: Mr Bran Black

Role: Chief Executive

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

Former roles:

- Chief of Staff, NSW Premier
- Chief of Staff, NSW Treasurer
- Director, NSW Premier
- Chief of Strategic Initiatives, UNSW

Proxy

s. 47F(1)

Name: s. 47F(1)

Role: Director

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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Regional Australia Institute

Apology



Name: Liz Ritchie

Role: Chief Executive Officer

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Former roles:

- Regional General Manager, Westpac
- State Director, Committee for Economic Development of Australia, Western Australia

Proxy

s. 47F(1)

Name: s. 47F(1)

Role: Director, External Affairs

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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National Farmers' Federation

Apology



Name: Mr Tony Mahar

Role: Chief Executive Officer

Member of MACSM 2022-23: Yes

Former roles:

- Director, Australian Food and Grocery Council
- Senior Policy Advisor, Commonwealth Department of Agriculture

Proxy

s. 47F(1)

Name: s. 47F(1)

Role: General manager – Workplace Relations and Legal Affairs

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

United Workers Union

Apology



Name: Mr Tim Kennedy

Role: National Secretary

Member of MACSM 2022-23: No

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Other attendees

Jobs and Skills Australia	
	**Name**: David Turvey
	Role: Acting Commissioner
	Former roles: • First Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, Skills and Employment • General Manager, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
	**Name**: Cliff Bingham
	Role: Acting First Assistance Secretary
	Former roles: • Assistant Secretary, National Skills Commission • Assistant Commissioner, Australian Taxation Office

MACSM Experts Sub-committee Chair	
	**Name**: Liz Collett
	Role: Global Fellow, Migration Policy Institute
	Former roles: • Special Adviser to IOM Director General • Director, Migration Policy Institute Europe • Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre

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Skilled Migration Officials Group Representative	
No photo available	**Name**: s. 22(1)(a)(ii)
	Role: Director, Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

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Attachment D: Background

Agenda item 3: Update from Jobs and Skills Australia

- Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) was formally established on 16 November 2022 to provide independent advice on current, emerging, and future workforce, skills, and training needs.
    - On 22 March 2022, the Australian Government introduced a Bill to finalise JSA's permanent arrangements as a tripartite, statutory body. This Bill is still being considered by Parliament.
- On 10 January 2024, Professor Barney Glover AO was appointed as the new JSA Commissioner, commencing a five-year term in April 2024.
- The Migration Strategy includes a new commitment to establish a formal role for Jobs and Skills Australia in defining Australia's skills needs using evidence, including advice from tripartite mechanisms.
- Specifically, the Migration Strategy indicates that JSA's primary role in the migration system will be to advise on labour shortages as inputs into the design and delivery of a targeted temporary skilled migration system, through:
    - labour market analysis relevant to the Specialist Skills Pathway
    - defining a new Core Skills Occupation List for the Core Skills Pathway
    - advice on appropriate sectors and occupations in the Essential Skills Pathway.

Agenda item 4: Update and discussion on the Migration Strategy

2024-25 permanent Migration Program

- Consultations on the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program were held in November and December 2023 and included a public call for written submissions, roundtables with key stakeholders, and engagement with states and territories through correspondence, an IDC and the Ministerial Roundtable.
- Key themes from the consultations include support for maintaining the size and composition of the Migration Program, the need to consider availability of housing, services and infrastructure, and support for regional Australia.

Multi-year Migration Planning Model

- At a National Cabinet meeting on 16 August 2023, First Ministers agreed to better coordinate Australia's migration settings including by developing a principles-based, multi-year planning model for migration, to improve collaboration with states and territories on migration settings.
- Through a cross-jurisdictional Working Group, and input from bilateral meetings with all states and territories, two options for a multi-year planning model for migration have been developed.
    - The options extend the planning horizon for the permeant Migration Program from one year to four years, and a range of flexibility and agility features to respond to changing economic and geopolitical circumstances.
- These models will be proposed for Government consideration alongside proposals on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program in the 2024–25 Budget process.

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Regional migration

- There are a range of visa programs that support regional Australia:
    - **Regional provisional visas**: dedicated regional migration programs which provide a pathway to permanent residence after three years for skilled migrants that live and work in regional Australia.
    - **Designated Area Migration Agreements**: tailored agreements which provide flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions.
    - **Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme**: is open to all sectors and industries where there is a genuine shortage of Australian workers, but is currently addressing workforce needs in key sectors in rural and regional Australia.
        - According to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, as at 31 January 2024, there were 37,255 Pacific and Timor-Leste workers participating in the PALM scheme with more than 67 per cent (25,013) of PALM workers supporting Australia's agriculture sector.
- The 2023–24 Migration Program planning level for regional visas is 32,300 places. The state and territory nominated planning level is 30,400 places. This is a proportional decrease due to the decrease in the overall size of the Migration Program, from 195,000 in 2022-23 to 190,000 in 2023–24.
- The Regional and State and Territory Nominated visa categories, which both contain visas nominated by state and territory governments, account for 33 per cent of the planning level. This is the same proportion as in 2022–23.
- The Migration Strategy includes an existing commitment to increase skilled migration to help meet labour shortages in regional Australia.
    - Skilled regional visa allocations increased from approximately 11,000 in 2021–22 to 34,000 in 2022 23, and 32,300 in 2023-24.
- Ministerial Direction No. 105 commenced from 15 December 2023 and elevates applications for employer sponsored visas in relation to occupations to be carried out in regional Australia to the highest priority.
    - This supports regional Australia by streamlining visa processing for business located in regional Australia who are sponsoring skilled workers.
- The Government is further committed to evaluating regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia and does not contribute to the exploitation of workers.
    - Further consultation, including with key regional stakeholders and states and territories, is expected to commence in 2024.

Talent and Innovation

- The Migration Strategy committed to consider the development of a new Talent and Innovation visa to drive growth in sectors of national importance. It notes:
    - broad concerns about the effectiveness and poor fiscal and economic outcomes of the existing Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP)
    - the opportunity to target the existing Global Talent program to a relatively small number of migrants who can make outsized contributions to Australia, and

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- the opportunity to incorporate some objectives of the current BIIP visa to create a single, streamlined pathway for relatively small numbers of highly talented migrants such as high performing entrepreneurs, major investors and global researchers.

- The Strategy announced that, as the Government considers the design of the new, single Talent and Innovation visa, the Government will not provide any new allocations for the BIIP visa.
- The Migration Review sought improved clarity in the Global Talent selection criteria.
- The Migration Review also noted several stakeholders had questioned the value of the BIIP, given the growth in investment funding availability and the poorer economic and fiscal outcomes being delivered by BIIP migrants.
- The Global Talent visa is intended to attract migrants with a record of outstanding achievement, entrepreneurial ideas and cutting edge skills who can make a major contribution to Australia.
- The 2023–24 Migration Program allocates places for Global Talent visas and as at 23 February 2024, there were 3,970 applications on hand.
- The BIIP is intended to attract investors, entrepreneurs and innovators. It has 1,900 places allocated in the 2023–24 Migration Planning levels and at 31 December 2023 there were 19,865 applications on hand for the initial Provisional BIIP visa.
- The current BIIP appears to be attracting predominantly small to medium business owners and investors – some 70% of the on hand applications were for the Business Innovation stream and 17% were for the Investor stream. In comparison, the Significant Investor stream accounts for 12% of the caseload and the Entrepreneur stream accounts for less than 1%.
- The Government is further committed considering a new Talent and Innovation visa which could replace the current Global Talent and BIIP products.

Points Test

- The Migration Strategy sets an area for future reform to "explore a reformed points test to better identify migrants who drive Australia's long-term prosperity".
    - The Migration Review considers that a recalibrated points test should 'form the core of a future permanent skilled migration program'.
- The points test plays a pivotal role in driving Australia's long-term prosperity, but reform is needed to get it working for the nation in the decades ahead.
- The points test is the primary self-nominated, independent pathway to become a permanent migrant and is critical to restoring permanency at the heart of our migration system.
- The Migration Review found that although labour market outcomes of Skilled Independent migrants is relatively strong, the points test is not well calibrated.
- Overall, the current points test is not sufficiently granular to effectively differentiate between applicants or to give applicants a realistic sense of the likely success of their application.
- Further consideration should be given to the emphasis placed on a spouse's attributes.
- The points test currently underpins three different visas – the skilled independent (189), state and territory nominated (190) and regional (491/191) visas.
- It is intended to select migrants who may not have a job in Australia but who have the skills and attributes to contribute to the labour force and economy.
- The points test allocates points to migrant characteristics such as age, qualifications, skills, and English proficiency, and then ranks prospective migrants by their overall points.

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  - Migrants need to have a qualification and relevant experience related to a job on an occupation list, an IELTS of at least 6, be below the age limit of 45 and score at least 65 points to be eligible for a points tested visa.

- States and territory visas and regional visas also use the points test where migrants need to secure a nomination from a state or territory government in order to receive a visa.

Agenda item 5: Introduction from the Expert Sub-committee Chair

- An Expert Sub-committee of MACSM has been established to support you and MACSM through the provision of robust, evidence-based, expert analysis and advice; and progressing project work to deliver agreed MACSM outcomes, including via:
  - relevant analysis and/or research papers commissioned/requested by the Minister/MACSM Secretariat
  - provision of advice on preferred approaches, based on academic/international migration program expertise
  - provision of relevant benchmarking with international approaches
  - other deliverables, as requested by the Minister/MACSM Secretariat.
- The Sub-committee is currently scheduled to meet 6 times in 2024.

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Attachment E: Talking points (including "if asked")

Agenda item 1: Welcome and opening remarks (Minister Giles) 9:30 – 9:40

[Speech submitted by the Media and Communications Branch to the Minister's Office]

Good morning everyone.

First, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and extend those respects to any First Nations people here today.

A big welcome to Parliament House. It is my pleasure to Chair this reformed Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration and can I say it's great to see both returning and new members? I certainly value this timely opportunity to seek your advice on key skilled migration issues to ensure we get our settings right for workers, businesses and all Australians.

I'd also like to especially welcome Liz Collett, who is the chair of our Expert Sub-Committee that has been established to support us through relevant research, analysis and advice on key issues. We'll be hearing from Liz later.

And a big welcome to our colleagues from Jobs and Skills Australia, who will also give us an insight into their key priorities and role in the implementation of the Migration Strategy.

It has been a pretty momentous 12 months in this space and a lot has been achieved — there are stats that I will give today that clearly demonstrate we have made significant progress, but — of course — there is much more to do.

Upfront, I'd like to commend the staff in the Department of Home Affairs for the incredible work they have done in beginning to turn around our migration system.

It's certainly moving a lot more quickly and efficiently than it has been for decades. Let me quickly recap on just what has been achieved in the last 12 months.

[Where we were]

Around this time last year, we received the Review of the Migration System Final Report, commissioned to ensure Australia's migration system could better meet existing challenges and set a clear direction for the coming decades.

What it told us was that that during the past 10 years, perhaps more, we had lost focus on the priorities that would build our competitiveness in attracting the skills and knowledge we need from overseas and to put them where they could be the most productive.

Parts of the system were broken and the bar had become set relatively low for low-skilled, often 'permanently' temporary migrants who had no pathway to become permanent migrants. And the bar had become set high — with added difficulty in time, cost and stress — for highly skilled, permanent migrants.

In other words, we ended up with a system geared to deliver the opposite of what we really wanted and needed.

Neither did we have a long-term planning process that linked with levers that made migration successful, such as planning for housing, infrastructure and services.

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Or skilled migration matched to the needs of the workforce and the economy. That needed to be restored to its central place in migration policy, to help raise living standards for all Australians.

We needed to rebuild our business case as a first-choice country and remove as many of the barriers to entry as possible in order to attract the right people with the right skills who could fill the right jobs in the right places. That's why we had to get our migration and visa settings right.

The Review of the Migration System, in partnership with the Rapid Review into the Exploitation of Australia's Visa System led to the December release of our eagerly anticipated Migration Strategy.

The Strategy provides a roadmap to a massive reset of our visa and migration system. One that helps get the right people with the right skills into the country as quickly and efficiently as possible by streamlining the migration and visa process.

[What we have done]

I'm proud to say that the 2022–23 Migration Program was delivered in full, highlighted by 142,000 skilled migration places, accounting for 73 per cent of the overall program. This was the largest skilled migration program in Australia's history.

This year, the Department is on track to also deliver the 2023-24 Migration Program in full, and we have achieved some spectacular results at the half-way mark.

As at 31 December 2023, 121,215 places have been delivered against the overall planning level of 190,000. This comprises:

- 86,068 places in the skill stream — 27% ahead of pro-rata (the Skilled planning level is 137,100 places).
- 35,033 places have been delivered in the Family stream — 35% ahead of pro-rata (the Family planning level is 52,500 places); and
- 114 places have been delivered in the Special eligibility stream against a planning level of 400 places.

In other achievements, we have raised the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) — which will be replaced by the core skills threshold — from $53,900 to $70,000 to ensure visa holders are not paid less than an Australian worker in a similar role and that Australian workers are not disadvantaged.

On 15 December 2023, Ministerial Direction Number 105 prioritising skilled visa applications came into effect. This recognises the need to support regional Australia by streamlining visa processing and prioritising business sponsoring skilled workers.

We are allowing employers to nominate holders of all streams of Temporary Skilled Shortage visas, reducing the time a TSS holder must hold their visa and work in a nominated position or occupation.

We are also removing the requirement for nominated occupations in the Temporary Residence Transition stream to be assessed against a skilled migration occupation list.

And we are already fast tracking getting properly skilled workers into the country. The results have been remarkable. We are now granting half of all Temporary Skilled Shortage visa applications in just 22 days. That's just over three weeks from an application to an employee being able to board a plane to Australia.

As proof of that — in the construction industry, for example — in the first six months of this financial year we've already delivered more than 6000 permanent and temporary visas for workers. This is on track to top the 10,500 visas granted last year.

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Our changes are making working in Australia more attractive to prospective migrants.

We're providing a pathway to permanent residence for temporary skilled visa holders while streamlining the pathway to permanent residence for all skilled employer-sponsored migrants — reducing the work experience requirement from three to two years.

We have also established the Aged Care Industry Labour Agreement, which strikes a balance between the opportunities that migration can bring in building a workforce while recognising the vulnerabilities faced by workers on temporary sponsored visas.

We also reformed the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme while delivering a new Pacific Engagement Visa to encourage more mobility within our region.

[What we will do next]

We know there is more to be done and we look to strengthen combined efforts towards the Government's ambitious vision. I'm sure some great ideas will come out of today's meetings.

And we do have a new policy commitment to plan migration over a longer-term horizon in collaboration with states and territories with multi-year planning models for permanent migration under consideration.

If I look at the 2023-2024 Migration Program in some detail, I can say that it has been structured to address persistent and emerging skills shortages and to attract people with specialist skillsets that are difficult to find or develop in Australia like some of those in health engineering and science roles.

The TSS visa will be replaced later this year by the Skills in Demand visa, a temporary skilled worker visa that will be valid for up to four years. This new visa will have three pathways.

There's the Specialist Skills pathway for those beneficial to national productivity and support of sovereign capabilities, the Core Skills pathway enabling most temporary skilled migrants across all industries and the proposed Essential Skills pathway.

The latter will offer a regulated tripartite process to manage lower paid workforce shortages within an industry. In this approach, Government, employers and unions would work together to acknowledge and address systemic workforce shortages in lower paid occupations.

The Government will also evaluate regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program. The objective will be to see how migration settings can better support community and workforce needs in regional Australia.

We will also be exploring a reformed points test to better identify migrants who will drive Australia's long-term prosperity while considering a new Talent and Innovation visa to drive growth in sectors of national importance.

[Conclusion]

We are now deliberately creating a migration system that supports targeting and attracting the best workers with most sought-after skills. And we are making it easier for employers to sponsor them, and for those migrants to apply for, get a visa, get here and get into whatever they do best.

We've also created improvements and new pathways to achieve that. Of course, it is still early days and as I said, it will take some time to bed down our new settings.

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This is a big and ongoing body of work that will realise the benefits of our migration strategy over the next 10 years and beyond.

But it will deliver to us those skills that we need to sustain our future competitiveness, prosperity and reputation as one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world.

Thank you.

[END]

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Agenda item 2: Update from the Department of Home Affairs 9:40 – 10:00 (Michael Willard)

Overview of MACSM arrangements

- As Minister Giles indicated, there are five MACSM meetings scheduled for 2024. The MACSM Secretariat team will be in contact with each of you ahead of each meeting to provide further details and background materials.
- If you have any enquiries about MACSM arrangements, including sitting fees and other administration matters, please feel free to contact the Secretariat team at any time.
- I note that our Secretariat team and the broader Department also manage a number of other fora, including the bi-annual Ministerial Migration Roundtable (also chaired by Minister Giles), the Skilled Migration Officials Group and other dedicated engagements focused on specific areas of work.
- We have been working to sequence these fora in a logical way, to progress migration priorities of Government and those of our stakeholders.
- The Department is engaging with colleagues from other Commonwealth portfolios, including those under the Skills portfolio, to better align efforts across Government and enhance collaboration towards shared objectives.
- As Minister Giles mentioned, this is also the first time a Sub-committee of MACSM has been established. Liz Collett will speak more on the role and function of the sub-committee later on in the meeting.

Recent developments

- The Department continues to administer its immigration programs in a way that advances our national interests and supports migrants and their families.
- The 2023–24 permanent Migration Program has been designed to address the persistent and emerging skills shortages and to attract people with specialist skillsets, while also strengthening community bonds in Australia and maintaining the Government's commitment to family reunification.
- As we progress through the second half of this program year, the 2023-24 Migration Program continues to be supported by strong visa pipelines across both the Skilled and Family streams.
    - In this program year to 31 January 2024, there have been nearly **102,000 Skilled visa grants** with most of these counting towards the delivery of the Skilled stream in the Migration Program.
    - As at 31 January 2024, over **12,000 Skilled visas** had been granted to **healthcare professionals** and over **1,900 grants** to **teaching professionals.**
- The volume of new visa applications, across all programs including skilled categories, continues to rise, with nearly **5.7 million lodged between July and January** of this program year.
    - This is 29.4 per cent more than the just under 4.4 million applications lodged in the same period in 2022-23.
    - Despite an upsurge in lodgements this program year, visa applications in many programs are being processed in a timely manner.
- Demand for Student visas in the current program year (year-to-date) is also above the previous program year (year-to-date 2022-23), with a growth of 6.8 per cent in lodgements.
- At the end of December 2023 there were over **170,000** Working Holiday Makers in the country, well above pre-COVID levels and WHMs continue to be processed very quickly:
    - Theses WHMs often travel and spend money in regional areas and fill short term seasonal labour gaps
- Visa processing times are updated on the Department's website as new data is available. They were last updated on 29 February 2024 to reflect the processing time for visa applications finalised in January 2024.

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- While processing times have improved for some subclasses, other visa programs have seen increases as older cases are being finalised.
- *If not addressed in Minister Giles opening remarks*: On 15 December 2023, Ministerial Direction 105 came into effect and prioritises the processing of skilled visa applications for employer sponsored visas relating to occupations in regional Australia.
    - For Temporary Skill Shortage applications, **regional applications** are being assessed, and finalised where complete, within **two business days of lodgement**. Applications in the **healthcare and education sectors** are being assessed, and finalised where complete, within **three to five business days** of lodgement.
- On 15 December 2023, Ministerial Direction No. 107 commenced, to support faster processing for genuine, high quality students enrolled with low risk providers.
    - The Department will continue to assess all applications in date order under each priority category and visa applications in lower priority will take longer to process.
- Before Jobs and Skills Australia discuss the new Core Skills Occupation List, I will provide some context about the Government's new policy commitment, through the Migration Strategy, which underpins JSA's role.
- The first key action of the Migration Strategy is building a new temporary skilled migration system to address skills needs and enhance worker mobility. This will include the development of a new Skills in Demand visa.
- The Skills in Demand visa will be a temporary skilled worker visa valid for up to 4 years and will replace the Temporary Skill Shortage visa and its three streams. A key feature of the visa will be enabling full mobility for employees, rather than single employer sponsorship. This means visa holders will not be tied to one employer under their visa conditions.
- All visa holders will have a clear and fair pathway to permanent residence. Periods of employment with any approved employer will count towards permanent residence requirement.
- The Skills in Demand visa will include 3 pathways:
    - **Specialist Skills Pathway** – recognising highlight skilled migrants who bring significant economic benefits to Australia.
    - **Core Skills Pathway** – designed to bring in the skilled employees Australia needs now and in the future.
    - **Essential Skills Pathway** – development of this pathway is an area of future reform and the Government.
- I welcome any questions on the Department's delivery of programs and upcoming priorities.

Agenda item 3: Update from Jobs and Skills Australia

[Jobs and Skills Australia to lead]

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Agenda item 4: Update and discussion on the Migration Strategy (Michael Willard)

The Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's *Migration Strategy* was released on 11 December 2023 and outlines a new vision for Australia's migration system.
- It was informed by extensive consultation with business, unions and other stakeholders, and more than 450 submissions received as part of the *Review of the Migration System*.
- The background paper in your meeting packs provides a short overview of the Strategy, and I'd like to update you on some key policy developments since the release.

2024-25 permanent Migration Program

- Consultations on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program were held in November and December 2023, and have now concluded.
- Our consultation approach included:
    - a call for written submissions from the public and from government agencies. We received 138 submissions from the public and 12 submissions from state, territory and Commonwealth Government agencies. This was an increase from last year where we received 52 public submissions and 11 from government agencies
    - four targeted roundtables with industry, academic experts, community groups, and unions
    - engagement with states and territories through correspondence, a Band 2/3 interdepartmental committee and the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable.
- Through this consultation process, key themes emerged across stakeholder groups, including:
    - widespread support for maintaining the size of the permanent Migration Program at approximately 190,000 and the composition at 70 per cent Skill Stream and 30 per cent Family stream.
    - the need to consider availability of housing, services and infrastructure for existing residents and newcomers
    - calls for targeted support for regional Australia
    - support for the idea of a multi-year planning model.
- The size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program will be considered by Government as part of the 2024–25 Budget Process, and will take into a range of factors including key issues raised in consultations, and analysis of visa pipelines, population and workforce data and international trends.
- We expect 2024–25 may be the last year that we plan a single year permanent Migration Program, as we transition to a multi-year planning model from 2025–26, subject to Government consideration.
- Options for a multi-year Migration Planning model will also be considered in the 2024–25 Budget context, alongside the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program.

Multi-year Migration Planning Model

- At a National Cabinet meeting on 16 August First Ministers agreed to better coordinate Australia's migration settings including by developing a principles-based, multi-year planning model for migration, to improve collaboration with states and territories on migration settings.
- In October 2023, the Department began work with states and territories to develop a principles-based, multi-year planning model for migration, establishing a cross-jurisdictional Working Group.

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- The Working Group was guided by Terms of Reference and members represented the Department of Home Affairs as well as each state and territory. Officials from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Jobs and Skills Australia, the Department of Treasury and the Centre for Population (Treasury).
- The Working Group met three times between October 2023 and February 2024. These meetings were complemented by a series of in-person bilateral meetings with all states and territories.

- The principles to guide the development of the model were developed by the Working Group, and were endorsed by all states and territories at the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable in December 2023.
- Also through the Working Group and bilateral meetings, multi-year migration planning model options have been developed.
- The models:
  - extend the current one year planning horizon of the permanent Migration program to four years
  - feature indicative ranges that can provide an upper and lower bound set at a percentage of the planning levels for each year of the program cycle
  - also include new, reworked and scalable features that could be introduced throughout the program cycle to allow for better planning alignment, flexibility and agility.
- These models will be proposed for Government consideration alongside proposals on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program.
- Should the Government decide to implement at multi-year model, implementation will be guided by the endorsed principles and will include the development of program delivery flexibility measures, revitalised state migration plans, agility and responsiveness features within the model.

Regional Migration

- As signalled in the Migration Strategy the Government is committed to evaluating how migration settings can better support community and workforce needs in regional Australia.
- The Migration Review made a number of findings in relation to Regional Australia outlined in your papers.
- The evaluation will consider the regional visa framework, regional definitions, regional occupation lists and Designated Area Migration Agreements.
- There will be further opportunities to discuss policy settings during these meetings and this is a possible area of further work for the expert sub-committee.
- The Department will be finalising a discussion paper on this topic and we would welcome early views to inform further development of this paper.

Points Test

- The Government intends to explore reform of the points test to better select for migrants who drive Australia's long term prosperity and security, in particular to:
  - get the balance right between selecting the best temporary visa holders in Australia seeking to stay permanently, while also drawing new highly skilled permanent migrants to Australia.
- For example do bonus points, added over time as incentives have an outsized impact on outcomes in the Skilled migration program and possibly run counter to Government objectives including accelerating Net Overseas Migration?

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- An issues paper is planned for public consultation soon on a reformed points test to support these objectives
- There will be further opportunities to discuss policy settings during future meetings and this is a possible area of further work for the expert sub-committee.
- We're seeking your input to help inform this paper

Talent and Innovation

- The Migration Strategy commits to reshaping the permanent skilled migration system to ensure Australia attracts and retains the most valuable skilled migrants to drive Australia's long-term prosperity.
- In addition to the reformed points test, the Government will consider a new Talent and Innovation visa program for migrants who can drive growth in sectors of national importance.
- The Government's broader reforms, such as the new Specialist Skills Pathway, will open up new and streamlined pathways for highly skilled migrants with the skills we need. This allows the Government to:
    - more sharply target the existing Global Talent program to a relatively small number of migrants who can make an outsized contribution to Australia.
    - consider how best to target innovative investments and entrepreneurship in sectors of national importance.

I would welcome questions or views to inform the final design of this program.

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Attachment F: Background papers distributed to MACSM members

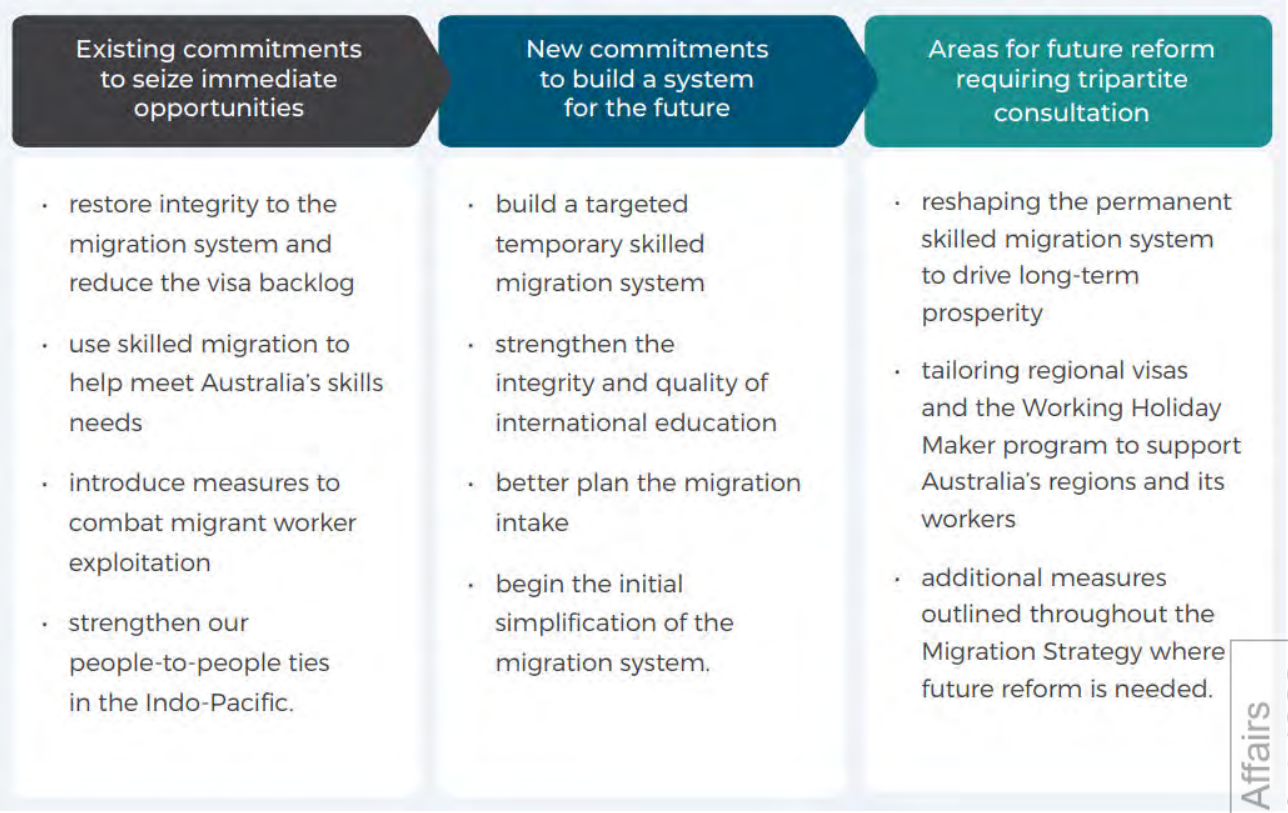
Background paper 1: Overview of the Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's *Migration Strategy* was released on 11 December 2023 and outlines a new vision for Australia's migration system.
- The *Migration Strategy* is informed by extensive consultation with business, unions and other stakeholders, and more than 450 submissions received as part of the *Review of the Migration System*.
- The *Migration Strategy* forms a core part of the Government's broader five-pillar productivity agenda and the need to build a skilled and adaptable workforce, as outlined in the *Employment White Paper*.
- Five core objectives will underpin Australia's migration system, getting migration working for the nation and helping build a prosperous and secure Australia:
    - **Raising living standards** by boosting productivity, meeting skills shortages and supporting exports.
    - **Ensuring a fair go in the workplace** by complementing the jobs, wages and conditions of all workers and preventing migrant worker exploitation.
    - **Building stronger Australian communities** by better planning the migration intake, and giving migrants the opportunity to invest in their lives in Australia through permanent residence and citizenship.
    - **Strengthening international relationships** by building stronger economic and social connections with our region and international partners.
    - **Making the system work** by being fast, efficient and fair for migrants and employers.
- The *Migration Strategy* is focused on developing a flexible, measurable and responsive whole-of-government migration system.
- To realise the Government's vision and objectives for the migration system, an ambitious policy roadmap has been developed with 8 key actions:
    1. **Targeting temporary skilled migration to address skills needs and promote worker mobility** – a new Skills in Demand visa with three targeted pathways, and visa settings that encourage migrant worker mobility in the labour market.
    2. **Reshaping permanent skilled migration to drive long-term prosperity** – a commitment to explore a reformed points test for permanent skilled migration, and a new Talent and Innovation visa for migrants who can drive growth in sectors of national importance.
    3. **Strengthening the integrity and quality of international education** – a package of integrity measures to lift the standards for international students and education providers, while ensuring graduates help meet skills shortages and do not become 'permanently temporary'.
    4. **Tackling worker exploitation and the misuse of the visa system** – a comprehensive suite of legislation, powers, penalties and policies to combat worker exploitation and restore integrity to the migration system.
    5. **Planning migration to get the right skills in the right places** – a longer-term, evidence-based approach to planning migration that closely collaborates with states and territories and ensures population planning is based on the best available population data and forecasts.
    6. **Tailoring regional visas and the Working Holiday Maker Program to support regional Australia and its workers** – a new direction to ensure visas for regional Australia are prioritised first, and a commitment to evaluating regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia and does not contribute to worker exploitation.

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7. **Deepening our people-to-people ties in the Indo-Pacific** – a new approach to developing people-to-people links with our region, including through a direct pathway to citizenship for New Zealanders and increased mobility with Pacific Island and Southeast Asian countries.
8. **Simplifying the migration system to improve the experience for migrants and employers** – a system-wide simplification agenda that will streamline visa settings, reduce visa classes and make the system easier to use.

- Skilled migration reforms will better connect skilled migrants to Australia's skills needs, helping to reignite productivity growth, which will ensure rising living standards, business growth and better wages.
- The policy roadmap will be delivered across three stages of reform. Across these actions, a phased approach will ensure strong delivery of existing commitments, new commitments to build a system for the future, and areas for future reform requiring tripartite consultation.



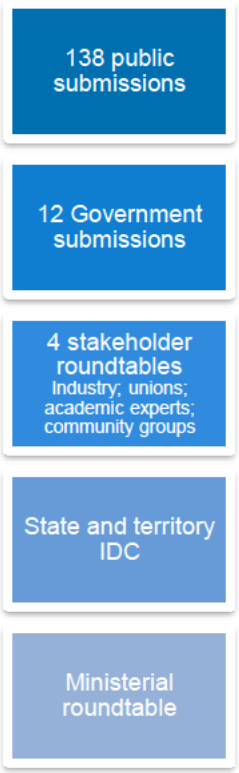
- The Migration Strategy – Action Plan sets out an implementation timeline for existing and new commitments and a consultation timeline for areas for future reform.
- The Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration will provide regular feedback on the delivery of reforms outlined in the Migration Strategy. This will be undertaken in close coordination with Jobs and Skills Australia and its tripartite mechanisms.

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Background paper 2: Permanent Migration Program planning

2024–25 permanent Migration Program

- Consultation on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program were held in November and December 2023.
- The Department of Home Affairs called for **written submissions** publicly on the Department's website and through Ministerial letters to states and territories. Enhanced engagement through the Department's outreach networks—namely the Community Liaison Officer Network and the Business, Industry and Regional Outreach officers—contributed to receiving 138 written submissions from the public.
    - This was an increase on 52 public submissions received when planning the 2023–24 permanent Migration Program.
- The Department is continuing to explore ways to enhance engagement with the public consultation process in future years, including in the expected transition to a multi-year migration planning model from 2025–26.
- The Department also hosted **targeted roundtable consultations** with key representatives from industry and business, academic experts (economists and demographers), and community and multicultural groups. The Department supported a roundtable the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs hosted with union representatives.
- The Commonwealth engaged with **states and territories and Commonwealth stakeholders** at both the official and Ministerial level. Discussions on the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program occurred at the Band 2/3 cross-jurisdictional interdepartmental committee, and at the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable in December 2023.



- Key themes from consultation included:
    - support for maintaining the size of the permanent Migration Program at approximately 190,000 and the composition at 70 per cent Skill Stream and 30 per cent Family stream
    - the need to consider availability of housing, services and infrastructure for existing residents and newcomers
    - calls for targeted support for regional Australia
    - support for the idea of a multi-year planning model.
- The size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program will be considered by Government as part of the 2024–25 Budget process. This will take into account a range of factors including outcomes of consultation, and analysis of visa pipelines, population and workforce data, and international trends.

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Multi-year Migration planning

- In October 2023, the Department began work with states and territories as well as Commonwealth stakeholders to develop a principles-based, multi-year planning model for migration, establishing a cross-jurisdictional Working Group. The Working Group met three times between October 2023 and February 2024. These meetings were complemented by a series of in-person bilateral meetings with all states and territories.
- In December 2023, the principles to guide the development of a multi-year model were endorsed by all states and territories at the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable:
    - **Working together**: The Commonwealth, States, and Territories work together to identify Australia's migration needs and priorities and to deliver a seamless migration experience.
    - **Positive contribution**: Migration programs optimise a positive contribution to Australia's social cohesion and economy and ensure skilled migration programs fill demonstrable skill gaps that are unable to be met domestically.
    - **Regional focus**: Migration programs must help to ensure that regional Australia benefits from comprehensive migration and population planning.
    - **Aligned investments**: Migration programs are aligned with investments in infrastructure, service provision and housing.
    - **Population planning alignment**: Migration planning is aligned with Commonwealth, State, and Territory population planning.
    - **Transparency**: Greater collaboration across governments around data-sharing, skills shortage evaluation tools and other capabilities supports transparent and evidence-based decision making.
    - **Flexibility**: Migration planning has flexibility to respond to domestic and global economic fluctuations, geopolitical events and program management considerations.
- Two multi-year migration planning model options have been developed using input from Working Group discussions, bilateral meetings, written submissions, feedback from states and territories and through consultation with whole of government colleagues.
    - Both models extend the current one year planning horizon of the permanent Migration program to four years.
    - Both feature indicative ranges that can provide an upper and lower bound set at a percentage of the planning levels for each year of the program cycle.
    - Both models also include new, reworked and scalable features that could be introduced throughout the program cycle to allow for better planning alignment, flexibility and agility.
- These models will be proposed for government consideration alongside proposals on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program.
- The Multi-year Migration Planning Working Group has provided feedback on the models. Once these models are finalised, the Working Group will be disbanded.
- Should the government decide to implement a multi-year model, implementation will be guided by the endorsed principles and will include the development of program delivery flexibility measures, revitalised state migration plans, agility and responsiveness features within the model.
- All features are expected to reflect the shared understandings of all governments that are set out in the principles, including aligning investments and population planning, ensuring flexibility and transparency.

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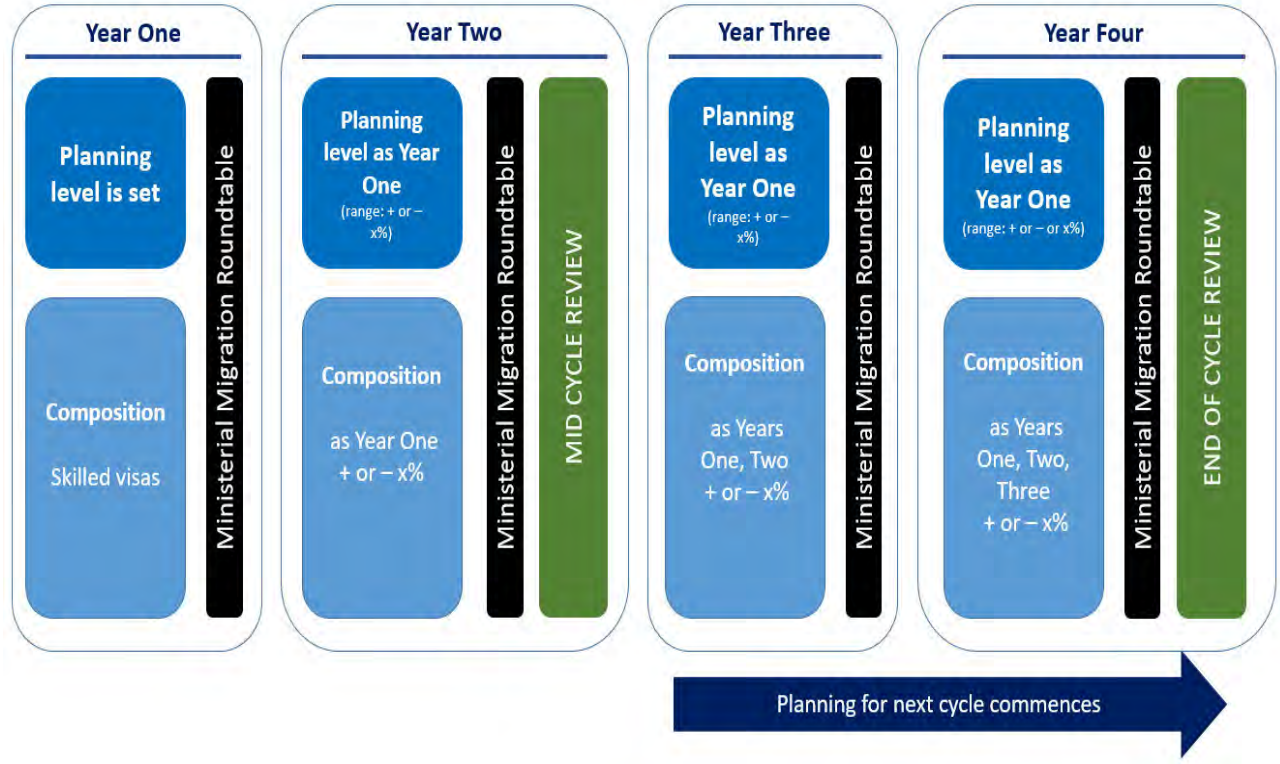


Figure: Multi-year migration planning model

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Background paper 3: Regional migration

Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's Migration Strategy (page 88) committed to designate visa processing to regional Australia as the highest processing priority and evaluate regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia and does not contribute to the exploitation of workers.
- On 15 December 2023, the Government issued Ministerial Direction 105, which recognises regional Australia's need for skilled workers by streamlining visa processing arrangements and making employer sponsored visas in regional Australia the highest processing priority.
- The next stage of reform will be informed by an evaluation of regional migration settings. The evaluation will consider the regional visa framework, regional definitions, regional occupation lists and Designated Area Migration Agreements. The evaluation will align with other pieces of work underway such as the Food Supply Chain Capacity Study being undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review made several findings with respect to regional Australia:

1. Challenges in regional Australia cannot be addressed purely by migration.
    - Migrants, across all visa programs, have been less likely than Australians to live in regional areas.
    - Factors such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, housing and access to services are more important in attracting and retaining regional populations, than the provision of regionally-focused migration pathways.
2. Regional migration programs have had limited success to-date.
    - While many submissions strongly supported the continuation of specific regional visas and concessions, others questioned the net benefit to Australia.
    - Census data indicates that a large majority of recently arrived migrants (86 per cent) live in capital city areas.
3. Some regional visas are overly complex and do not have clear objectives.
    - Stakeholders told the review that some visa programs are too complex and slow, such as Designated Area Migration Agreements.
    - Others criticised the definition of 'regional' used for migration purposes, which provides varying degrees of regional incentives for all but the major cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.
4. Regional migrants have mixed outcomes.
    - While labour force participation rates were high, many migrants worked in lower skilled roles and had lower median incomes than their non-regional counterparts.
5. Different jurisdictions have different goals.
    - States, territories and regions have differing labour market needs.
    - States and Territories seek greater control of migration flows to more effectively plan infrastructure and services.

Regional visa settings

- Specific regional migration initiatives have been in place since 1994 and are designed to enable states and territories to address unique workforce and planning needs not addressed by national migration programs, and to encourage a more balanced dispersal of migrants in Australia.
- There are a broad range of permanent and temporary visa programs, as well as mainstream visas with regional concessions, including:

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- **Skilled Regional provisional visas**, requiring migrants to live and work in a designated regional area for three years before becoming eligible for permanent residence. These visas are the Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 491) and the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494).
- **Designated Area Migration Agreements**, which provide concessions to standard visa requirements and can be negotiated to attract skilled and semi-skilled workers to a particular region.
- **Points Tested visas**, which provide points to be awarded on the basis of a regional nomination by a state or territory, family sponsorship or time spent studying in a university located in a designated regional area. These visas are the Skilled Nominated (subclass 190) visa and the Skilled Independent (subclass 189) visa.
- **Visas with regional incentives**, including the Working Holiday Maker Program and graduate visas which incentivise visa holders to spend time living and working and/or studying in regional areas in order to extend their stay in Australia. These visas are the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa, the Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa and the Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa.
- **Industry Labour Agreements** with a number of key industries, including the meat, pork, dairy, fishing and aged care , which enable access to more flexible visa arrangements and semi-skilled occupations.
- **The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility** (PALM) scheme, which allows Australian employers in certain industries to hire workers, with a focus on rural and regional Australia, from 9 Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste.

- These regional migration programs and incentives are supplemented by a substantial allocation of regional visas in the permanent Migration Program and prioritisation of regional visa processing.

Next steps

- A discussion paper on the evaluation of regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker Program will be published in 2024.
- We are seeking your early views to inform the development of the discussion paper.

Question for discussion

1. Is there a better definition that can be used to define ‘regional’?
2. Are any visa products potentially redundant?
3. What visa settings encourage regional migration?
4. What complementary, non-visa measures would foster long term retention and settlement of migrants in regional Australia?

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Background paper 4: Talent and Innovation

Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's Migration Strategy (pages 54-59) committed to consider the development of a new Talent and Innovation visa to drive growth in sectors of national importance.
- The Strategy noted:
    - broad concerns about the effectiveness and poor fiscal and economic outcomes of the existing Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP)
    - the opportunity to target the existing Global Talent program to a relatively small number of migrants who can make outsized contributions to Australia, and
        - the opportunity to incorporate some objectives of the current BIIP visa to create a single, streamlined pathway for relatively small numbers of highly talented migrants such as high performing entrepreneurs and global researchers.
- The Strategy announced that, as the Government considers the design of the new, single Talent and Innovation visa, the Government will not provide any new allocations for the BIIP visa.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review (pages 51-72) sought improved clarity in the Global Talent selection criteria
- The Migration Review also noted several stakeholders had questioned the value of the BIIP, given the growth in investment funding availability and the poor economic and fiscal outcomes being delivered by BIIP migrants.

Global Talent settings

- The Global Talent visa is intended to attract migrants with a record of outstanding achievement, entrepreneurial ideas and cutting edge skills who can make a major contribution to Australia. The 2023-24 Migration Program allocated 5,000 places for Global Talent visas and 300 for distinguished Talent visas. As at 23 February 2024, there were 3,970 applications on hand.

BIIP settings

- The BIIP is intended to attract investors, entrepreneurs and innovators. It has 1,900 places allocated in the 2023-34 Migration Planning levels and at 31 December 2023 there were 19,865 applications on hand for the initial Provisional BIIP visa.
- The current BIIP appears to be attracting predominantly small to medium sized business owners and investors – some 70% of the on hand applications were for the Business Innovation stream and 17% were for the Investor stream. In comparison, the Significant Investor stream accounts for 12% of the caseload and the Entrepreneur stream accounts for less than 1%.

Next steps

- Government is considering design for a new Talent and Innovation visa.
- We are seeking your input to help inform this design.

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Questions for discussion

1. How well do the BIIP and Global Talent visas deliver value for businesses and workers?
2. What features would be desirable to retain in a new Talent and Innovation visa?
3. How can state and territory governments support the identification and attraction of talented and innovative migrants?

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Background paper 5: Points test

Migration Strategy

- The Migration Strategy (page 58) committed to explore a reformed points test to better identify migrants who will drive Australia's long-term prosperity.
- The points test plays a pivotal role in driving Australia's long-term prosperity, but reform is needed to get it working for the nation in the decades ahead.
- The points test is the primary self-nominated, independent pathway to become a permanent migrant and is critical to restoring permanency at the heart of our migration system.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review (pages 63-72) found that although labour market outcomes of Skilled Independent migrants is relatively strong, the points test is not well calibrated.
- Overall, the current points test is not sufficiently granular to effectively differentiate between applicants or to give applicants a realistic sense of the likely success of their application.
- Bonus points, added over time as incentives are having an outsized impact on outcomes in the Skilled migration program.
- Further consideration should be given to the emphasis placed on a spouse's attributes.

Points test settings

- The points test currently underpins three different visas – the skilled independent (subclass 189), state and territory nominated (subclass 190) and the regional (subclass 491) visa.
- It is intended to select migrants with high human capital, who have the skills and attributes to contribute to the labour force and economy. These applicants do not need a current job or job offer to be eligible.
- The points test allocates points to migrant characteristics such as age, qualifications, skills, and English proficiency, and then ranks prospective migrants by their overall points.
    - Migrants need to have a qualification and relevant experience related to a job on an occupation list, an IELTS of at least 6, be below the age limit of 45 and score at least 65 points to be eligible for a points tested visa.
- States and territory nominated visas and regional visas also use the points test where migrants need to secure a nomination from a state or territory government in order to be invited to apply for a subclass 190 or 491 visa.

Next steps

- An issues paper is planned for public consultation on a reformed points test to support our objectives for the Migration System.
- We're seeking your input to help inform this paper.

Question for discussion

1. What migrant characteristics have you found are indicators of success? (what do we include that works well, are there characteristics that we're not including?)
2. Are there underrepresented groups of migrants/skills that businesses are missing out on? (e.g. younger workers, experienced professionals, women, couples, etc.)
3. Are there settings that are leading to, or encouraging migrants who aren't contributing strongly? (i.e. points categories that aren't helping to select successful migrants)

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Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration Background Paper

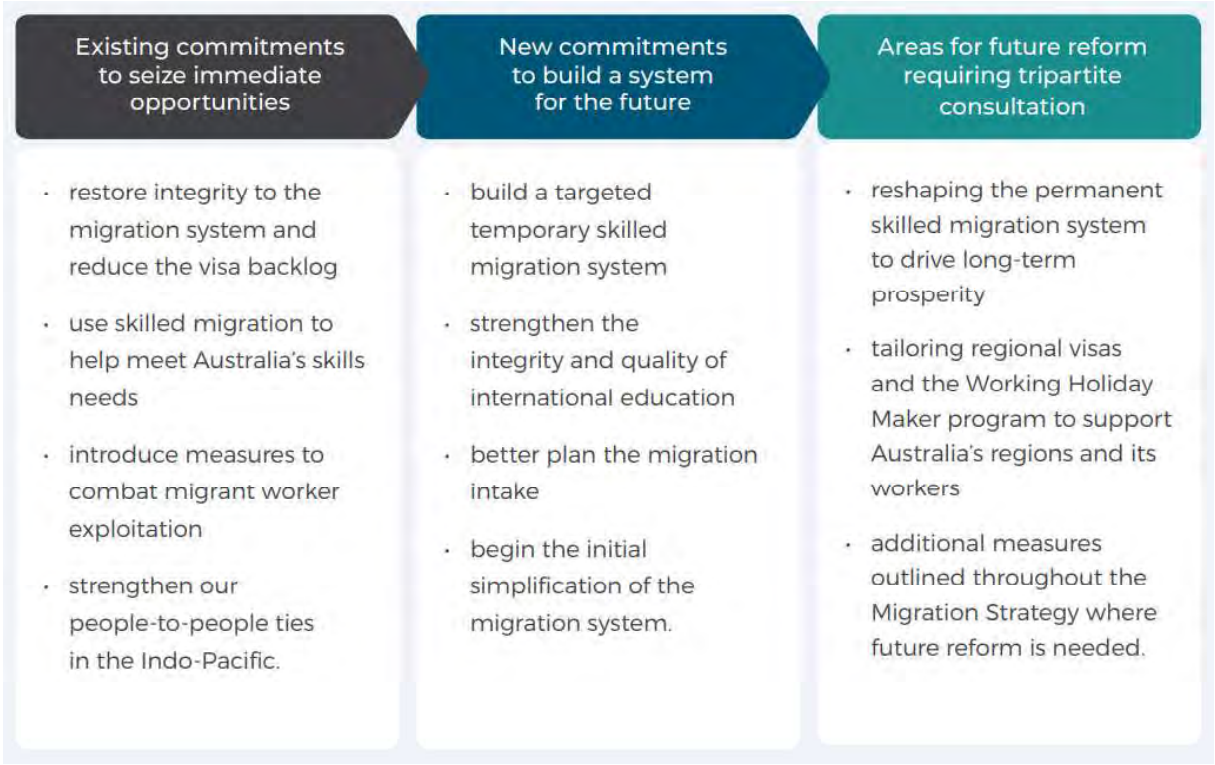
Overview of the Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's *Migration Strategy* was released on 11 December 2023 and outlines a new vision for Australia's migration system.
- The *Migration Strategy* is informed by extensive consultation with business, unions and other stakeholders, and more than 450 submissions received as part of the *Review of the Migration System*.
- The *Migration Strategy* forms a core part of the Government's broader five-pillar productivity agenda and the need to build a skilled and adaptable workforce, as outlined in the *Employment White Paper*.
- Five core objectives will underpin Australia's migration system, getting migration working for the nation and helping build a prosperous and secure Australia:
    - **Raising living standards** by boosting productivity, meeting skills shortages and supporting exports.
    - **Ensuring a fair go in the workplace** by complementing the jobs, wages and conditions of all workers and preventing migrant worker exploitation.
    - **Building stronger Australian communities** by better planning the migration intake, and giving migrants the opportunity to invest in their lives in Australia through permanent residence and citizenship.
    - **Strengthening international relationships** by building stronger economic and social connections with our region and international partners.
    - **Making the system work** by being fast, efficient and fair for migrants and employers.
- The *Migration Strategy* is focused on developing a flexible, measurable and responsive whole-of-government migration system.
- To realise the Government's vision and objectives for the migration system, an ambitious policy roadmap has been developed with 8 key actions:
    1. **Targeting temporary skilled migration to address skills needs and promote worker mobility –** a new Skills in Demand visa with three targeted pathways, and visa settings that encourage migrant worker mobility in the labour market.
    2. **Reshaping permanent skilled migration to drive long-term prosperity –** a commitment to explore a reformed points test for permanent skilled migration, and a new Talent and Innovation visa for migrants who can drive growth in sectors of national importance.
    3. **Strengthening the integrity and quality of international education –** a package of integrity measures to lift the standards for international students and education providers, while ensuring graduates help meet skills shortages and do not become 'permanently temporary'.
    4. **Tackling worker exploitation and the misuse of the visa system –** a comprehensive suite of legislation, powers, penalties and policies to combat worker exploitation and restore integrity to the migration system.
    5. **Planning migration to get the right skills in the right places –** a longer-term, evidence-based approach to planning migration that closely collaborates with states and territories and ensures population planning is based on the best available population data and forecasts.

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6. **Tailoring regional visas and the Working Holiday Maker Program to support regional Australia and its workers –** a new direction to ensure visas for regional Australia are prioritised first, and a commitment to evaluating regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia and does not contribute to worker exploitation.
7. **Deepening our people-to-people ties in the Indo-Pacific –** a new approach to developing people-to-people links with our region, including through a direct pathway to citizenship for New Zealanders and increased mobility with Pacific Island and Southeast Asian countries.
8. **Simplifying the migration system to improve the experience for migrants and employers –** a system-wide simplification agenda that will streamline visa settings, reduce visa classes and make the system easier to use.

- Skilled migration reforms will better connect skilled migrants to Australia's skills needs, helping to reignite productivity growth, which will ensure rising living standards, business growth and better wages.
- The policy roadmap will be delivered across three stages of reform. Across these actions, a phased approach will ensure strong delivery of existing commitments, new commitments to build a system for the future, and areas for future reform requiring tripartite consultation.



- The Migration Strategy – Action Plan sets out an implementation timeline for existing and new commitments and a consultation timeline for areas for future reform.
- The Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration will provide regular feedback on the delivery of reforms outlined in the Migration Strategy. This will be undertaken in close coordination with Jobs and Skills Australia and its tripartite mechanisms.

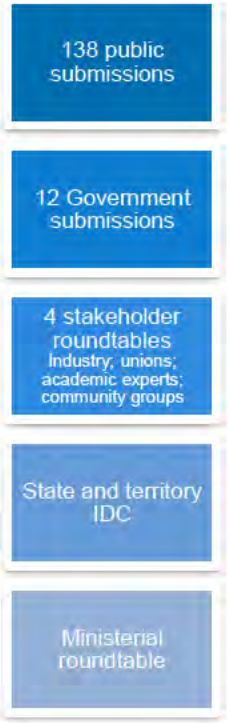
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Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration Background Paper

Permanent Migration Program planning

2024–25 permanent Migration Program

- Consultation on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program were held in November and December 2023.
- The Department of Home Affairs called for **written submissions** publicly on the Department's website and through Ministerial letters to states and territories. Enhanced engagement through the Department's outreach networks—namely the Community Liaison Officer Network and the Business, Industry and Regional Outreach officers—contributed to receiving 138 written submissions from the public.
    - This was an increase on 52 public submissions received when planning the 2023–24 permanent Migration Program.
- The Department is continuing to explore ways to enhance engagement with the public consultation process in future years, including in the expected transition to a multi-year migration planning model from 2025–26.
- The Department also hosted **targeted roundtable consultations** with key representatives from industry and business, academic experts (economists and demographers), and community and multicultural groups. The Department supported a roundtable the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs hosted with union representatives.
- The Commonwealth engaged with **states and territories and Commonwealth stakeholders** at both the official and Ministerial level. Discussions on the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program occurred at the Band 2/3 cross-jurisdictional interdepartmental committee, and at the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable in December 2023.



- Key themes from consultation included:
    - support for maintaining the size of the permanent Migration Program at approximately 190,000 and the composition at 70 per cent Skill Stream and 30 per cent Family stream
    - the need to consider availability of housing, services and infrastructure for existing residents and newcomers
    - calls for targeted support for regional Australia
    - support for the idea of a multi-year planning model.
- The size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program will be considered by Government as part of the 2024–25 Budget process. This will take into account a range of factors including outcomes of consultation, and analysis of visa pipelines, population and workforce data, and international trends.

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Multi-year Migration planning

- In October 2023, the Department began work with states and territories as well as Commonwealth stakeholders to develop a principles-based, multi-year planning model for migration, establishing a cross-jurisdictional Working Group. The Working Group met three times between October 2023 and February 2024. These meetings were complemented by a series of in-person bilateral meetings with all states and territories.
- In December 2023, the principles to guide the development of a multi-year model were endorsed by all states and territories at the inaugural Ministerial Migration Roundtable:
    - **Working together**: The Commonwealth, States, and Territories work together to identify Australia's migration needs and priorities and to deliver a seamless migration experience.
    - **Positive contribution**: Migration programs optimise a positive contribution to Australia's social cohesion and economy and ensure skilled migration programs fill demonstrable skill gaps that are unable to be met domestically.
    - **Regional focus**: Migration programs must help to ensure that regional Australia benefits from comprehensive migration and population planning.
    - **Aligned investments**: Migration programs are aligned with investments in infrastructure, service provision and housing.
    - **Population planning alignment**: Migration planning is aligned with Commonwealth, State, and Territory population planning.
    - **Transparency**: Greater collaboration across governments around data-sharing, skills shortage evaluation tools and other capabilities supports transparent and evidence-based decision making.
    - **Flexibility**: Migration planning has flexibility to respond to domestic and global economic fluctuations, geopolitical events and program management considerations.
- Two multi-year migration planning model options have been developed using input from Working Group discussions, bilateral meetings, written submissions, feedback from states and territories and through consultation with whole of government colleagues.
    - Both models extend the current one year planning horizon of the permanent Migration program to four years.
    - Both feature indicative ranges that can provide an upper and lower bound set at a percentage of the planning levels for each year of the program cycle.
    - Both models also include new, reworked and scalable features that could be introduced throughout the program cycle to allow for better planning alignment, flexibility and agility.
- These models will be proposed for government consideration alongside proposals on the size and composition of the 2024–25 permanent Migration program.
- The Multi-year Migration Planning Working Group has provided feedback on the models. Once these models are finalised, the Working Group will be disbanded.
- Should the government decide to implement a multi-year model, implementation will be guided by the endorsed principles and will include the development of program delivery flexibility measures, revitalised state migration plans, agility and responsiveness features within the model.
- All features are expected to reflect the shared understandings of all governments that are set out in the principles, including aligning investments and population planning, ensuring flexibility and transparency.

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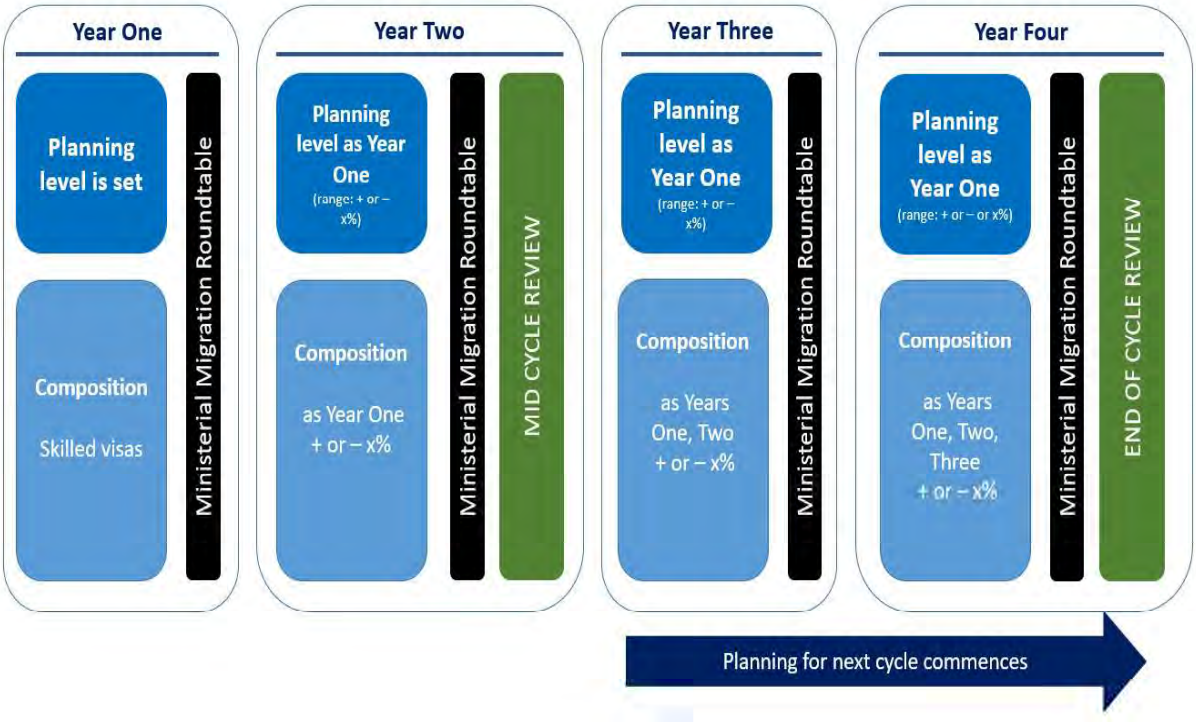


Figure: Multi-year migration planning model

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Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration Background Paper

Regional migration

Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's Migration Strategy (page 88) committed to designate visa processing to regional Australia as the highest processing priority and evaluate regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia and does not contribute to the exploitation of workers.
- On 15 December 2023, the Government issued Ministerial Direction 105, which recognises regional Australia's need for skilled workers by streamlining visa processing arrangements and making employer sponsored visas in regional Australia the highest processing priority.
- The next stage of reform will be informed by an evaluation of regional migration settings. The evaluation will consider the regional visa framework, regional definitions, regional occupation lists and Designated Area Migration Agreements. The evaluation will align with other pieces of work underway such as the Food Supply Chain Capacity Study being undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review made several findings with respect to regional Australia:

1. Challenges in regional Australia cannot be addressed purely by migration.
    - Migrants, across all visa programs, have been less likely than Australians to live in regional areas.
    - Factors such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, housing and access to services are more important in attracting and retaining regional populations, than the provision of regionally-focused migration pathways.
2. Regional migration programs have had limited success to-date.
    - While many submissions strongly supported the continuation of specific regional visas and concessions, others questioned the net benefit to Australia.
    - Census data indicates that a large majority of recently arrived migrants (86 per cent) live in capital city areas.
3. Some regional visas are overly complex and do not have clear objectives.
    - Stakeholders told the review that some visa programs are too complex and slow, such as Designated Area Migration Agreements.
    - Others criticised the definition of 'regional' used for migration purposes, which provides varying degrees of regional incentives for all but the major cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.
4. Regional migrants have mixed outcomes.
    - While labour force participation rates were high, many migrants worked in lower skilled roles and had lower median incomes than their non-regional counterparts.
5. Different jurisdictions have different goals.
    - States, territories and regions have differing labour market needs.
    - States and Territories seek greater control of migration flows to more effectively plan infrastructure and services.

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Regional visa settings

- Specific regional migration initiatives have been in place since 1994 and are designed to enable states and territories to address unique workforce and planning needs not addressed by national migration programs, and to encourage a more balanced dispersal of migrants in Australia.
- There are a broad range of permanent and temporary visa programs, as well as mainstream visas with regional concessions, including:
    - **Skilled Regional provisional visas**, requiring migrants to live and work in a designated regional area for three years before becoming eligible for permanent residence. These visas are the Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 491) and the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494).
    - **Designated Area Migration Agreements**, which provide concessions to standard visa requirements and can be negotiated to attract skilled and semi-skilled workers to a particular region.
    - **Points Tested visas**, which provide points to be awarded on the basis of a regional nomination by a state or territory, family sponsorship or time spent studying in a university located in a designated regional area. These visas are the Skilled Nominated (subclass 190) visa and the Skilled Independent (subclass 189) visa.
    - **Visas with regional incentives**, including the Working Holiday Maker Program and graduate visas which incentivise visa holders to spend time living and working and/or studying in regional areas in order to extend their stay in Australia. These visas are the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa, the Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa and the Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa.
    - **Industry Labour Agreements** with a number of key industries, including the meat, pork, dairy, fishing and aged care , which enable access to more flexible visa arrangements and semi-skilled occupations.
    - **The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility** (PALM) scheme, which allows Australian employers in certain industries to hire workers, with a focus on rural and regional Australia, from 9 Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste.
- These regional migration programs and incentives are supplemented by a substantial allocation of regional visas in the permanent Migration Program and prioritisation of regional visa processing.

Next steps

- A discussion paper on the evaluation of regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker Program will be published in 2024.
- We are seeking your early views to inform the development of the discussion paper.

Question for discussion

1. Is there a better definition that can be used to define 'regional'?
2. Are any visa products potentially redundant?
3. What visa settings encourage regional migration?
4. What complementary, non-visa measures would foster long term retention and settlement of migrants in regional Australia?

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Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration Background Paper

Talent and Innovation

Migration Strategy

- The Australian Government's Migration Strategy (pages 54-59) committed to consider the development of a new Talent and Innovation visa to drive growth in sectors of national importance.
- The Strategy noted:
    - broad concerns about the effectiveness and poor fiscal and economic outcomes of the existing Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP)
    - the opportunity to target the existing Global Talent program to a relatively small number of migrants who can make outsized contributions to Australia, and
        - the opportunity to incorporate some objectives of the current BIIP visa to create a single, streamlined pathway for relatively small numbers of highly talented migrants such as high performing entrepreneurs and global researchers.
- The Strategy announced that, as the Government considers the design of the new, single Talent and Innovation visa, the Government will not provide any new allocations for the BIIP visa.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review (pages 51-72) sought improved clarity in the Global Talent selection criteria
- The Migration Review also noted several stakeholders had questioned the value of the BIIP, given the growth in investment funding availability and the poor economic and fiscal outcomes being delivered by BIIP migrants.

Global Talent settings

- The Global Talent visa is intended to attract migrants with a record of outstanding achievement, entrepreneurial ideas and cutting edge skills who can make a major contribution to Australia. The 2023-24 Migration Program allocated 5,000 places for Global Talent visas and 300 for distinguished Talent visas. As at 23 February 2024, there were 3,970 applications on hand.

BIIP settings

- The BIIP is intended to attract investors, entrepreneurs and innovators. It has 1,900 places allocated in the 2023-34 Migration Planning levels and at 31 December 2023 there were 19,865 applications on hand for the initial Provisional BIIP visa.
- The current BIIP appears to be attracting predominantly small to medium sized business owners and investors – some 70% of the on hand applications were for the Business Innovation stream and 17% were for the Investor stream. In comparison, the Significant Investor stream accounts for 12% of the caseload and the Entrepreneur stream accounts for less than 1%.

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Next steps

- Government is considering design for a new Talent and Innovation visa.
- We are seeking your input to help inform this design.

Questions for discussion

1. How well do the BIIP and Global Talent visas deliver value for businesses and workers?
2. What features would be desirable to retain in a new Talent and Innovation visa?
3. How can state and territory governments support the identification and attraction of talented and innovative migrants?

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Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration Background Paper

Points test

Migration Strategy

- The Migration Strategy (page 58) committed to explore a reformed points test to better identify migrants who will drive Australia's long-term prosperity.
- The points test plays a pivotal role in driving Australia's long-term prosperity, but reform is needed to get it working for the nation in the decades ahead.
- The points test is the primary self-nominated, independent pathway to become a permanent migrant and is critical to restoring permanency at the heart of our migration system.

Migration Review

- The Migration Review (pages 63-72) found that although labour market outcomes of Skilled Independent migrants is relatively strong, the points test is not well calibrated.
- Overall, the current points test is not sufficiently granular to effectively differentiate between applicants or to give applicants a realistic sense of the likely success of their application.
- Bonus points, added over time as incentives are having an outsized impact on outcomes in the Skilled migration program.
- Further consideration should be given to the emphasis placed on a spouse's attributes.

Points test settings

- The points test currently underpins three different visas – the skilled independent (subclass 189), state and territory nominated (subclass 190) and the regional (subclass 491) visa.
- It is intended to select migrants with high human capital, who have the skills and attributes to contribute to the labour force and economy. These applicants do not need a current job or job offer to be eligible.
- The points test allocates points to migrant characteristics such as age, qualifications, skills, and English proficiency, and then ranks prospective migrants by their overall points.
    - Migrants need to have a qualification and relevant experience related to a job on an occupation list, an IELTS of at least 6, be below the age limit of 45 and score at least 65 points to be eligible for a points tested visa.
- States and territory nominated visas and regional visas also use the points test where migrants need to secure a nomination from a state or territory government in order to be invited to apply for a subclass 190 or 491 visa.

Next steps

- An issues paper is planned for public consultation on a reformed points test to support our objectives for the Migration System.
- We're seeking your input to help inform this paper.

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Question for discussion

1. What migrant characteristics have you found are indicators of success? (what do we include that works well, are there characteristics that we're not including?)
2. Are there underrepresented groups of migrants/skills that businesses are missing out on? (e.g. younger workers, experienced professionals, women, couples, etc.)
3. Are there settings that are leading to, or encouraging migrants who aren't contributing strongly? (i.e. points categories that aren't helping to select successful migrants)

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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICIAL

Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration
Meeting Minutes

Date Monday 24 June 2024

Time 9:30 am - 12:00 pm (AEST)

Location Australian Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Attendees

Organisation	Attendees
Commonwealth Government	**The Hon Andrew Giles MP – Chair** Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
	Minister Kristy McBain Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories
	Professor Barney Glover AO Commissioner Jobs and Skills Australia
	Cliff Bingham Assistant Secretary Jobs and Skills Australia
	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
	Laura Angus First Assistant Secretary Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	**Andrew McKellar** Chief Executive Officer
Australian Council of Trade Unions	**Michelle O'Neil** President
	Clare Middlemas (observer)
Australian Industry Group	**Innes Willox** (virtual) Chief Executive
Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union	**Steven Murphy** National Secretary
Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union	**Matt Journeaux** (virtual)
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation	**Annie Butler** (virtual) Federal Secretary
Business Council of Australia	s. 47F(1) (virtual) Director Skills, Education and Research *On behalf of* **Bran Black** Chief Executive Officer

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Organisation	Attendees
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	**Melinda Cilento** Chief Executive
Electrical Trades Union	**Michael Wright** National Secretary
National Farmers' Federation	s. 47F(1) General Manager *On behalf of* **Tony Mahar** Chief Executive Officer
Regional Australia Institute	s. 47F(1) Director External Affairs *On behalf of* **Liz Ritchie** Chief Executive Officer
Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association	**Gerard Dwyer** National Secretary-Treasurer
United Workers Union	**Tim Kennedy** (virtual) National Secretary
MACSM Expert Subcommittee Chair	**Elizabeth Collett**
Skilled Migration Officials' Group	**Anne McCotter** Associate Director, Business and Skilled Migration Investment, NSW
Department of Home Affairs	**Dr Emma Cassar** Associate Secretary, Immigration
	Tara Cavanagh Group Manager, Immigration Policy
	Paul Denman Assistant Secretary Immigration Planning and Policy
Commonwealth Advisors	**Henry Sherrell** Advisor to Minister Andrew Giles
	Nick Green Advisor to Minister Brendan O'Connor Minister for Skills and Training of Australia
Department of Home Affairs	MACSM Secretariat

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Item 1. Budget update

Minister Giles provided an update on the 2024-25 budget.

- Delivery of the Migration Strategy
  - $22.2 million over 4 years from 2024-25.
- Multi-year planning
  - $3.9 million over four years from 2024-25 for the transition to a new multi-year migration planning model over a four-year horizon for permanent non-humanitarian visas.
  - The planning levels for the 2024-25 Migration Program will be set at 185,000 places, with a significant increase in employer sponsorship to facilitate permanent migration.
- Migrant worker education package
  - $15.0 million over four years from 2024-25 to design an information and education package to empower migrant workers by providing accurate and appropriate information about workplace safeguards, protections and compliance measures.
- Implementation of National Innovation visa
  - $1.4 million in 2024-25 for the creation of a new National Innovation visa, including the permanent closure of the Business Innovation and Investment Visa Program.
  - The National Innovation visa will replace the Global Talent visa and will be introduced by the end of 2024.
- The Department is developing clear guidance for the transitional arrangements from the Global Talent visa to the new National Innovation visa.
- Data matching pilot
  - A successful data matching pilot between the Department and the Australian Taxation Office will provide a basis for the Government to achieve timely detection and prevention of exploitation of both migrant workers and abuse of Australia's labour market and migration system.

Minster Giles provided an update on the migration system.

- The Points Test review received about 200 submissions. The analysis of the submissions will be discussed in detail at the next MACSM meeting.
- The Regional Migration discussion paper was released on 21 June.
- Net overseas migration has been reduced and should stabilise in FY2024-25.
- Humanitarian intake is set at 20,000. Previous years have had the highest intake in a long time when the demand for humanitarian intake became greater than ever before.

Associate Secretary Dr Emma Cassar provided an update on the migration system outcomes.

- The Department continues to administer the migration program that advances Australia's national interest and supports migrants and their families.
- The 2023-24 migration program will be delivered in full by 7 June 2024. This includes a delivery of 136,000 skilled migrants.
- High visa lodgements continue for the current year with 8.6 million year-to-date lodgements, which is 20 percent higher compared to the same period last year.
- An increase in Temporary Skilled lodgements by 28 percent compared to the previous year. As of March 2024, median processing times have decreased to 28 days from 39 days in April.
- A large number of holidaymakers continue to arrive in the country with approximately 177,000 Working Holiday visa holders as of the end of May 2024. Working Holiday visa processing times have been reduced.
- The Working Holiday visa plays an important role in filling short-term seasonal labour gaps.
- An increase in visa lodgements and grants by more than 29 percent compared to last year.

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- A decrease in student visa lodgement for the current program by around two percent compared to the previous program year with lodgements from outside Australia decreasing by 10 percent whereas onshore increased by 19 percent.
- Student visa refusal rate is currently more than 20 percent (higher than pre-COVID levels), while visa grants are more than 35 percent lower compared to the same period last year. This reflects the integrity and quality of the Australian student visa program ensuring it supports a world-class international education system.
    - The 2024-25 permanent migration program will have a composition of 132,200 in the skills stream representing approximately 71 percent of the program. The stream is designed to improve the productivity capacity of the economy and address skill shortages, particularly in regional Australia.
    - The family stream has 52,500 places.
- Minister Giles added that there are strong responses for the Pacific Engagement visa which will be distributed by ballot, with 35,000 applications received.

Discussion

- Members discussed possible visas that could attract labourers in the construction industry. Members advised that last year there was a record number of construction industry visas granted and are hoping for similar numbers this year.
  Dr Cassar informed that recent consultations with federal agencies and organisations focused on attracting construction workers. The Department's business engagement team for regional Australia is working across federal departments to identify how visa applicants can be matched with the right employers.
  Immigration Policy Group Manager Tara Cavanagh added that the Department is also working closely with State and Territory officials to realise the value of regional visa streams to support the construction industry.
- Members enquired about changes to Working Holiday visa programs.
  Group Manager Tara Cavanagh responded that there are two changes to Working Holiday visas, the age limit which came into effect from 1 July 2023 and the ability to acquire an extra year will commence on 1 July 2024. The Regional Migration discussion paper will include the Working Holiday Maker program.
- Members expressed seeing changes to Working Holiday Maker visas and noted their relevance to the agricultural sector and the food supply chain study currently conducted by JSA to support the sector better.
  Minister Giles advised that the Government's interest in having a strong labour market is similar to other advanced countries. Pre-COVID-19 visa applications were around 10 million. Approximately 14 million visa decisions are made every year and the majority are tourist visas. The current on-hand applications is around 700,000.
- Members requested information on how the Government intends to track from 1 July 2024, the protections being introduced for migrant workers and employer compliance to improve workplace justice.
  Minister Giles responded that the measures in the Budget on the design of information and education package are important in eliminating worker exploitation, including the Department's ability to keep tracking the pilot for the workplace justice visa. The measures propose pilot protections against visa cancellations and workplace justice visas for temporary migrants who experience exploitation in the workplace.
- Member Michael Wright raised a particular issue that some 482 visa applicants who receive Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for their Certificate III do not undertake the Offshore Technical Skills Records (OTSR) process as they find vocational education difficult. As a result, in most jurisdictions including NSW, these 482 applicants are ineligible to practice as electricians. Members asked if the 482 visa process could include a preference in the OTSR pathway to acquire more electrician labourers.
  Minister Giles noted it is a significant issue and will enquire into it, and inform members accordingly (refer action item 1 at the end of the document).

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Item 2: Update on the MACSM subcommittee

The Chairperson of the MACSM subcommittee, Liz Collett provided an update on the work of the MACSM subcommittee (the subcommittee).

- The subcommittee's engagement with external experts from Regional Australia Institute, the Australian National University, and Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), to discuss migration issues that need research.
- The subcommittee's feedback in drafting discussion papers on Points Test and Regional Migration.
- The subcommittee has identified research areas to support policy development in three priority work areas currently on the policy agenda.
    - Regional migration
        - A comparative study to investigate how other governments of the world have approached regional migration, both in terms of visa setting and policies that encourage placed-based movement given the fast demographic change in certain countries.
        - Explore the availability of migrant support and how it is managed across the country.
    - Multiyear planning
        - Identify data needed to inform planning as the multiyear model continues to evolve into a fully-fledged framework.
        - Explore data gaps in regional Australia.
        - Support the development of State Migrations plans.
    - Complementary pathway
        - Explore how various pilot programs can be mainstreamed across the migration system, including reducing barriers for humanitarian migrants to access labour migration channels.
- The subcommittee will disseminate a paper on complementary pathways to seek input from members.
- The subcommittee's proposed research topics:
    - Explore measures to improve labour market outcomes for family members and communities, particularly within regional migration settings.
    - Investigate roles migrants can play in partnership with training and skills efforts.
    - Explore the utilisation of digital tools to support labour market integration, timely information dissemination, and connect people.
    - Explore factors impacting future migrants such as climate and infrastructure.
- Chairperson Collett requested Minister Giles to approve research the subcommittee has identified.
- Minister Giles acknowledged the substantive contribution of the subcommittee and noted the importance of research in addressing some of the critical policy questions.
- Members expressed gratitude to the subcommittee for its work.
- Members highlighted the importance of research involving women who have migrated as partners are disadvantaged in the system as they often do not get recognition for their skills and have had limited access to job opportunities.

Item 3: Update on the Core Skills Occupation List

Professor Barney Glover AO, of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) provided an update on the Core Skills Occupation List.

- The review of the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL) employed a structured survey research method and received:
    - 1,200 responses in total
    - 300 from employers
    - 900 from employees and migrant communities who have experience in the labour market.
- The review of the CSOL received 500 submissions from employers, peak bodies, unions, and JSA Councils. The submissions will be published on JSA website.

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- JSA's ongoing engagement with stakeholders to seek clarification on the information provided in the submissions.
- JSA will consider transitional aspects of establishing the CSOL, particularly in moving from the previous migration occupation list to CSOL.

Jobs and Skills AS Cliff Bingham gave a presentation on the key tenets of the Core Skills Occupations List.

- JSA's Migration Labour Market Indicator Model informed the drafting of CSOL for the new Skills in Demand visa.
- Stakeholder consultation processes and engagements in drafting the CSOL.
- Survey results of the Employer stream.
- Survey results of approaches used by employers to identify skills shortages.
- Survey results of employers' reasoning for sponsoring foreign workers.
- Survey results of workers' opinion about why employers consider visa holders to fill skill shortage gaps.

Discussion

- Members enquired about further processes for progressing the CSOL.
  Commissioner Glover responded that JSA's advice will be published and will include the rationale for every occupation in the list. Information will also be provided on:
  - Research methods adopted (focus groups, surveys, and submissions) that inform the CSOL.
  - Thematic issues, challenges to the retention of workers and training system, strengths of stakeholder engagement, and views on transitional arrangement.
- Members drew attention past shortages of electricians, as in the 1980s, and noted that shortages in electrical occupations would not be fixed by the CSOL, as it has been an ongoing issue.
- Members referred to *The Clean Energy Generation* report that forecasts 42,500 electricians to deliver outcomes for a net-zero economy, and discussed that this demand requires thinking beyond skilled migration.
- AS Bingham highlighted that JSA's current work on the 2024 employment rejections demonstrates a significant mismatch between the educational profile of young people undergoing vocational training and the needs of the labour market in the long term. This would have to be addressed as a matter of priority. JSA is keen to undertake work involving colleges that are trying to understand skills shortages to help diversify their limited set of skills courses on offer.
- Members discussed the continuous labour shortages in the meat industry which have occurred over the past 20 years. Members noted the importance of the CSOL and the migration system in filling skills gap in the meat industry. Members also noted that there is no recognised trade required in this sector, therefore the ability to upskill labourers is out of the question.
- AS Bingham contributed that JSA's work is not only about supply and demand issues, but migration has an important contribution as there are changes to suitability and retention gaps and short-term training gaps.
- Members questioned why the analysis on "workers' opinion on why employers use visa holders" (on page 15 of the PowerPoint presentation of the CSOL), has not considered capturing data on the option, "employers wanted to pay less to workers".
- AS Bingham responded that the answer to the question would be provided after consulting the CSOL team (refer action item 2 at the end of the document).
- Members requested clarification of results that shows 76 percent of employers hired employees from overseas to ease skills shortages (graph on page 10 of the PowerPoint presentation). Members questioned how representative the figure was.
- AS Bingham clarified that the graph on page 10 is not an analysis of skills shortages. It illustrates employer responses to a structured survey on temporary employer-sponsored migration, which is very specific.
- AS Bingham further added that JSA would be less concerned about the absolute because individuals not in this field would not complete the survey.

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- AS Bingham continued that JSA would be interested in the relativities between the graphs. AS Bingham advised that JSA would be concerned about the two scenarios, that is, if the overseas employee hire was not high for that self-selected group and if it was the only variable with a high percentage and the rest was 10 percent or less.
- Minister Giles added that the survey presented employers with multiple options/reasons to hire employees and that relativities are important. Employers do think about several ways to attract and retain the workforce.
- Members discussed that the CSOL should consider future provisions in skilled migration and the pipeline of domestic workers, and the role of education and training.
- Commissioner Glover added that JSA is finalising a skills priorities list for 2024 drawing from surveys and a whole range of data sets. This would be the list to refer to if members are interested in occupation skills shortages.
- Members requested how JSA would assess the extent to which the various strategies and skilled migration tend to address skills shortages.
  AS Bingham responded that the CSOL is testing whether an occupation should be on the list. There are no limits to the number of occupations to be on the list and also no limits to the number of visas that employers can seek. So there could be a few occupations that look robust in skills needs and worker outcomes but would have a few visas. It was noted that some occupations would have hundreds of visas in a year due to the nature of the size of occupations and their economic needs.
  AS Bingham advised that JSA's stakeholder consultations have informed that some skills needs have not been fulfilled up to 100 percent, and it is unclear if the migration can solve this. The migration system needs to work in collaboration with how workplaces are organised in terms of efforts to attract and retain workers, and consider the flow of graduates coming out of universities. For future reviews of the CSOL, consideration needs to be given to how these components move together and complement each other.
  The Minister added that one of the characteristics of the CSOL is its evolutionary nature. In revising the CSOL, the various occupations and the multi-faceted ways of assessing occupations will be considered.
- Members asked if the high-tech skills needs and capabilities emanating from the rapid technological change and the niche skills of regional areas, are included in the list.
  Minster Giles responded that the Department is working on emerging skills needs as much as skills shortages, and this work should impact employment projections on the skills priority list.
- Commissioner Glover informed that JSA would release the following reports later this year:
  - Food Supply Chain Capacity Study.
  - Recommendation on Working Holiday Visa Makers program.
  - International Student Pathways and Outcomes Study.
- Minister Giles thanked Commissioner Glover and AS Bingham for the presentation and for providing valuable feedback.

Item 4: Regional Migration

Minister Clare O'Neil provided an update on the migration system and reforms.

- Regional migration is an important topic being discussed for almost 18 months as part of the broader migration settings.
- The Government came into power at a time when the migration system was at a critical point fraught with challenges, including:
  - The largest labour shortage Australia has experienced since the Second World War.
  - A backlog of a million unprocessed visas.
  - The inability of the migration system to deliver outcomes for Australians, migrant workers, and the economy.
- The Government embarked on fixing the system in several areas:
  - The temporary skilled system, which will be online in December 2024.
  - The international education programs and visa settings.
  - The abolition of the long list of visas which did not deliver outcomes and had added complexity.

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  - The elimination of migrant worker exploitation and the establishment of the Employer Compliance Bill 2023.
  - The increase in Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold.
- The two key policy reforms for the portfolio are Points Test and Regional Migration. Both areas need thoughtful planning for a sustainable reform that should continue with future governments.
- The Minister thanked MACSM members and the Australian Council of Trade Unions for their support of the Migration Strategy.

Minister O'Neil provided an update on regional migration.

- Some parts of the country have strong growth in the migrant population and are densely populated, but some parts have not had much success in driving populations to parts of the country which are underpopulated and experience acute skills shortages. Regional problems that require attention are:
  - The way the migration system delivers to migrants in the regions is complicated and is the main issue.
  - Most businesses in the regions are not well established or large enough and find difficulty in navigating the complex bureaucratic processes to bring migrants.
  - The outcomes for migrants in the regions are not as good as those in metropolitan Australia. As soon as migrants complete their required regional stay, they move to cities for a permanent stay.
  - The Working Holiday Maker program has experienced exploitation.
  - Lack of sustainable planning to align with housing and infrastructure to support migrants.
- The permanent program now includes higher intakes for regional areas compared to past trends.
- The Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMAs) is extended to include specific skills shortages within regions that may not be part of the national shortage. There is also scope to expand DAMAs more broadly.
- The need to understand regional migration settings is crucial in terms of the needs of communities and businesses, their successes and failures, and support services required to better planning for regional migration outcomes.
- Minister Giles invited Hon Kristy McBain, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, to provide an update.

Minister McBain, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories provided an update on regional Australia.

- Informed that she is a member of Eden-Monaro which has a large regional electorate.
- Advised about her stakeholder engagement with regional businesses across the 547 local government areas and 50 Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees.
- Acknowledged the critical issue of skills shortage in regional areas.
- Noted that the solution for issues in regional areas may not be one-size-fits-all as issues in some parts of the country would be substantially different from other parts.
- Highlighted that the care economy has been suffering for a long time, experiencing acute labour shortages. The health sector workers, for instance, cannot access child care due to limited service providers, which inhibits health workers to move to regional locations.
- Highlighted that there are about 200 occupations in a local government area and this one level of government is present in every community, therefore they have a much larger role to play in providing relevant services to their local community.
- Workforce skills issues were raised in approximately half of the submissions made to the Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport.
- Local governments have reported on shortages of engineers, planners, building surveyors, and care workers and one of the main concerns of local government is limited access to training and development opportunities.
- There are 50 RDA committees, which are local boards consisting of business owners and community leaders. Their main role is to help drive entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment in local communities.

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- RDAs have been working across their local communities to identify skills shortages.
- Some RDAs have direct agreements with the Commonwealth and the State governments to help manage programs that support skilled migration in the regions.
- Some RDAs have agreements to provide support services directly to migrants.
- RDA Orana has DAMAs with the Commonwealth which supports migrant workers within the Orana region. Without the area migration agreements, it would not be possible to attract skills in the Orana region.
- The regional certifying bodies are responsible for providing advice on visa types.

- Noted that the Regional Migration discussion paper is an important piece of work to be taken forward.
- Minster Giles added that regional development discussion has important questions to answer: what determines individuals to move to regions; which pull factors decide long-term stays; and how regional definitions can be applied to better shape incentives in migration policy settings.

Discussion

- Members enquired about the consultation process for regional planning.
  Minster Giles responded that consultations have been held with States and Territories through the regular Skilled Migration Officials' Group (SMOG) and the Ministerial Migration Roundtable (MMR). These consultations have led to better identification of some of the visas that are more accessible than they were.
  Minster Giles informed that the Northern Territory and the South Australia governments have expressed appreciation that DAMAs are a more tailored migration solution that supports the needs of the labour market.
- Members raised the concern that if regions do not establish diverse and resilient communities, the short-term work arrangements will continue, which is against the broad objectives of regional migration.
- Members advised that the Designated Area Representatives (DARs) of DAMAs have not been an active voice for workers and unions. In several cases, the DARS that play a critical role are employer organisations.
- Members expressed concern that it is difficult to keep a constant pool of care industry workers, whether in regional or urban areas because for so long they have been undervalued. To see further linkages to skill shortages, the question that needs to be answered is, to what extent the shortages in the care industry can be explained by the industry's work conditions and work security.
- Members advised that employers had difficulty obtaining approval from Trades Recognition Australia as it is cumbersome and impacts on employers' ability to attract labourers.
- In contributing to the definition of "region", members highlighted that the different parts of regions, for instance, the fringes which are very different from the hub of the regions, have to be considered. Members also suggested using postcodes as a simple and recognised way to differentiate regions.
- Members informed that employers have provided feedback that DAMAs are complex and require simplification.
- Minister O'Neil highlighted that there is a lack of investment in creating resilient communities, however, it is beyond the scope of the Regional Migration discussion paper and needs to be considered in the context of broader challenges.
- Members asked how regional migration will ensure sustainable societies and provide for not just one generation but support several generations.
  Minister Giles responded that it is not just the regional visa conditions, but a bundle of elements to be considered in facilitating people's settlement journey.
- Members reiterated the issue about shortages of electricians and suggested the need to incorporate an industry-level approach as a way to fill shortage gaps both in training and skilled migration. Also, industries, employers, and unions need to be actively integrated into the regional framework to meet the net-zero economy.
- Minister O'Neil pointed out that local governments do have reasonable programs to assist the regions, but no one understands them.
- Minister O'Neil highlighted the threshold elements that could welcome migrants to regions, such as places of worship and community and cultural connections.

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- Minister O'Neil highlighted that the last decade's population growth did not help resolve the economic needs of the country. There were huge increases in the temporary programs (Students and Working Holiday Makers), but not in the regional skilled program. As the migration programs are mainstreamed, efforts need to focus on bolstering skilled migrants coming into Australia and, at the same time, bringing back the low-skilled migrants who have not succeeded in long-term stays in the regions.
- Members requested further refining the concept of "regionality" is important. There is a need to identify whether the issue is genuine skill shortages in the regions or whether there are other reasons that set them back.
- Minister Giles expressed appreciation for Professor Peter Shergold's work during the former government, as an impressive guide to what incentivises individuals to make a living in a particular community.
- Minister Giles clarified comments on DAMA's complexity and highlighted that there are two things in common: State Government involvement and a tripartite approach. The complexity is within the barrier, that is, the inability to deliver visas allocated in the DAMAs due to the small scale of RDAs. The Northern Territory and the South Australian governments have exhibited impressive results primarily due to the availability of State and Territory resources to help navigate the complexities of the DAMAs.
- Members noted that all States are somewhat similar based on their approach to migration, that is, all States have access to State nominations, DAMAs, and local labour agreements.

Item 5: Skills assessment for potential migrants in the construction and housing sector

Laura Angus, First Assistant Secretary, Careers and International, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations gave a presentation on skills assessment for potential migrants in the construction and housing sectors.

- As part of the 2024–25 Budget, the government aims to boost the number of skilled workers in the construction and housing sectors.
- The Budget recognises the importance of a skilled workforce in the construction sector and the need to streamline the visa system and skills assessment process.
- The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations aims to streamline the skills assessment process that will positively impact around 1,900 potential migrants from countries with comparable qualifications (who want to work in Australia's construction and housing sectors) and prioritise the processing of around 2,600 Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) skills assessments in targeted occupations related to the housing construction industry.
- Skills assessment applications with low risks will be fast-tracked.
- Comparable countries that do not require licenses will access the assessment process at a reduced cost.
- There is a timeline for the implementation of the streamlined skills assessment process. Stakeholder consultations and work design were completed in June 2024, and the entire skills assessment will be delivered in December 2024.
- There are about 23 anticipated occupations in scope. A handful of occupations will require a license to operate and can be prioritised but will not be considered in the streamed-line process.
- The completion of the streamlining of the skills assessment will be followed by the visa processing and then entering into employment.
- TRA is working with the Department to ensure priority processing of construction-related occupations for skilled visas.
- TRA submission to the review of the Points Test calls for a more balanced allocation of points across the tertiary landscape, particularly for technical trades, and clearer alignment between temporary and permanent residency.
- Stakeholder consultation with industry partners found that:
  - 24% of construction workers are migrants, compared to 32% for the broader workforce.
  - 42% of carpenters and 30% of painting trades workers change employment during participation in the Job Ready Program, compared to 19% of motor mechanics and 25% of hospitality workers.

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- The main reasons for changing employers are poor working conditions (25%), low wages (12%), a lack of opportunity for skill development (11%), and insufficient hours (11%).

Item 6: Closing remarks

Minister Giles

- Closed the meeting by highlighting that streamlining of the skills assessment presentation demonstrates an understanding of challenges to skilled migration and the relationship between skilled migration to skills and labour market more broadly.
- Thanked the First Assistant Secretary Angus, Commissioner Glover, and AS Bingham for their valuable work and insightful discussion.
- Thanked MACSM members for the productive discussion.
- Thanked Home Affairs officials for facilitating the conversations.

Action items

Item	Action	Responsibility	Status
1	The Minister's Office will investigate the issue of 482 visa applicants' inability to undertake the Offshore Technical Skills Records (OTSR) process, and provide an update to members.	Minister's Office	Pending
2	The Department will clarify with JSA why the analysis on "workers' opinion on why employers use visa holders" (on page 15 of the PowerPoint presentation of the CSOL), has not considered capturing data on the option, "employers wanted to pay less to workers".	Department	Pending

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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICIAL

Ref No: MC24-034916

Paddy Crumlin
National Secretary,
Maritime Union of Australia
Level 2, 365-375 Sussex Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Crumlin

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 November 2024 to the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Cyber Security and Minister for the Arts, concerning issues impacting workers in the maritime industry. The Australian Government is currently in caretaker mode, I have been asked to reply on the Minister's behalf.

In line with caretaker conventions, the Department of Home Affairs is unable to comment on policy matters at this time. Your views have been noted by the Department and you may wish to write again when the outcome of the election is known.

Evidence of skilled workers or employers failing to comply with their obligations or visa conditions should be referred to Border Watch. For more information, please refer to https://www.abf.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/borderwatch.

Thank you for raising these matters with the Minister.

Yours sincerely

Director
Employer Sponsored Policy
Immigration Operations Group
Department of Home Affairs
2 May 2025

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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICIAL

Ref No: MC25-009433

Paul Farrow
National Secretary,
Australian Workers' Union
16-20 Good Street
Granville NSW 2142

Dear Mr Farrow

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 February 2025 to the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Cyber Security and Minister for the Arts, and the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP, Assistant Minister for Immigration, concerning issues impacting workers in the maritime industry. The Australian Government is currently in caretaker mode, I have been asked to reply on the Minister's behalf.

In line with caretaker conventions, the Department of Home Affairs is unable to comment on policy matters at this time. Your views have been noted by the Department and you may wish to write again when the outcome of the election is known.

Evidence of skilled workers or employers failing to comply with their obligations or visa conditions should be referred to Border Watch. For more information, please refer to https://www.abf.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/borderwatch.

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Director
Employer Sponsored Policy
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2 May 2025

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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICIAL

SVB input – Meeting Brief for MHA and ACTU

30 June 2025

Past engagement with ACTU – in relation to Labour Agreements/Essential Skills

- On 1 May 2025, the Department consulted ACTU representative, Clare Middlemas, together with Matt Journeaux, Federal Secretary, Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) as key stakeholders in the Meat Industry Labour Agreement (MILA) Review. Further engagement between the Department and unions on the MILA is anticipated.
- In February 2024, MACSM members were briefed on the work being undertaken to inform the development of an Essential Skills pathway including the shift to state-led DAMAs and the reviews of the Aged Care ILA, MILA, MorLA and broader ILA review. Ms O'Neil represented the ACTU in MACSM at this time.
- ACTU representative, Clare Middlemas attended a Union consultation roundtable on 20 August 2024 to discuss development of the Essential Skills pathway of the new Skills in Demand visa.

Key messages

Labour Agreements and DAMAs

- **Note** that there continues to be strong demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers through the labour agreement program, including Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs).
- **Emphasise** that the Australian Government has reaffirmed its support for a state-led approach to Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs) which will support greater strategic oversight of the programs use.
- **Highlight** that consultation is a key feature in establishing DAMAs to ensure employment and training opportunities for Australians remains a priority and that the DAMA is targeted to the specific needs of a region. Relevant stakeholders include Jobs and Skills Australia, unions, industry bodies, regional development authorities, employers and other local business groups.
- **Note** the Government is on track with its commitments in the Migration Strategy to develop a more regulated stream for lower paid workers with essential skills – in consultation with state and territory governments, unions, businesses and other relevant stakeholders.
    - The Department continues to engage ACTU and other stakeholders in this process.

State-led Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs)

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- State and territory-led DAMAs will better align overseas migration with other jurisdictional levers that are vital to the attraction of overseas migrants to, and their long-term retention in, regional Australia. These levers include the planning for and provision of adequate infrastructure, housing, services, settlement and integration support, as well as education and training opportunities.
- The shift towards state-led DAMAs is under way. State and territory governments either have a state-led DAMA in place (SA, WA, NT), or are in the process of negotiating a DAMA or are conducting feasibility analysis for state-led DAMAs.
    - In their engagement with the Department, NSW Government officials noted they were seeking engagement with the ACTU on their DAMA feasibility study.

Review of Industry Labour Agreements (ILA)

- The Government has committed to a review of ILAs in consultation with relevant unions, peak bodies and government stakeholders.
- The internal review of the Aged Care ILA commenced in August 2024 with findings of the review to inform the future design of more regulated pathway for lower paid workers with essential skills.
    - The Department will continue to consult with relevant stakeholders on the review of the Aged Care ILA, which includes include ACTU as an important representative of the MACSM and relevant industry unions, peak bodies, skill assessing authorities, aged care providers and migrant workers.
- The Department is in the early stages of the Meat Industry Labour Agreement (MILA) which commenced in May 2025 to ensure the agreement is fit for purpose.
    - On 1 May 2025, the Department consulted ACTU representative, Clare Middlemas, and Matt Journeaux, Federal Secretary, Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) as key stakeholders in the MILA. Further engagement between the Department and unions on the MILA review is anticipated.

Background

Labour Agreement Program

- A labour agreement is a formal agreement between an Australian employer and the Australian Government. It provides a customisable solution for businesses to employ and recruit skilled overseas workers to fill critical skill shortages by workers on a temporary or permanent basis in circumstances that are not covered by the standard skilled visa program.
- Labour agreements can offer a range of alternative requirements to standard skilled visa requirements which may include flexibility to English language, qualifications, work experiences, age or salary requirements.

Industry Labour Agreements

- As part of the Labour Agreement Program, Industry Labour Agreements (ILAs) are formal contracts negotiated between the Australian government and a specific industry that have fixed terms and conditions with in-built concessions specific to an industry sector.
- As at 30 June 2025, there were 10 ILAs in place, including:
    - Advertising, Aged Care, Dairy, Fishing, Horticulture, Meat, Minister of Religion, On-hire, Pork and Restaurant (premium dining).

Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs)

- A Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) is a formal agreement between the Australian Government and a state or territory government or regional authority.
- There are currently 13 DAMAs in effect across Australia including:

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- four state-led DAMAs (two in SA and one in WA and the NT), and
- nine DAMA's administered by regional authorities: Far North Queensland (FNQ), Townsville (North Qld), Pilbara (WA), Kimberley (WA), The South West (WA), Goldfields (WA), Great South Coast (Vic), Goulburn Valley (Vic) and Orana (NSW).

Skills in Demand (SID) (subclass 482) visa

- Under the SID visa, the three stage process of sponsorship, nomination and visa application provides assurance by checking the credentials of the sponsor, the position and the applicant. Key criteria includes:
  - Labour Market Testing – employers must demonstrate that they have provided opportunity for Australians to apply for the job and can only nominate a migrant worker if no suitably qualified Australian is available.
  - Annual Market Salary Rate (AMSR) – employers must provide evidence that they will pay the overseas worker the same as they would pay an Australian worker, and that the AMSR is no less than the Core Skills Income Threshold – which increased on 1 July 2025 from AUD $73,150 to AUD $76,515 to ensure migrant wages keep pace with wages for Australian workers.
  - Employers must pay the Skilling Australians Fund (SAF) levy – which funds the training of Australian workers. The additional cost to hire a migrant compared to an Australian worker also helps ensure first priority of Australian workers.

Temporary Work (Short Stay Specialist) (subclass 400) visa

- Under the subclass 400 visa, there is no occupation list requirement, but the work must be highly specialised with the applicant having skills, knowledge or experience not generally available in Australia.
- The Department assesses subclass 400 visa application to ensure the work is non-ongoing in nature. Where an applicant has applied for a subsequent visa, decision makers can consider the total number of days the applicant has remained in Australia and consider granting the remaining period to a maximum of 6 months stay in any 12 month period. This ensures subclass 400 visas are only used as short term solutions and do not impact the longer term employment of Australian workers.
- Visa processing Officers will also consider employment contracts to ensure remuneration is fair and workers are not subject to exploitative conditions

PALM scheme, specifically exploitation and if/how the Working Holiday Maker visa is impacting the scheme, including concerns that this may be a less regulated visa

PALM

- Under the PALM scheme, there are two groups of workers:
  - seasonal workers, who can work in placements up to 9 months and can access a multi-year visa to return to Australia for up to 9 months each year for 4 years.
  - long-term workers, who can work in placements of 1 to 4 years duration.
- The Government applies proactive assurance activities designed to prevent, deter, detect and correct PALM scheme non-compliance with the requirements of the scheme. All allegations of PALM scheme worker mistreatment are taken seriously and investigated promptly and where appropriate, matters are referred to the relevant agencies, such as law enforcement and the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO).
- The overwhelming majority of PALM scheme employers engage with the scheme responsibly and workers report a positive experience in the program. The benefits it provides to workers, their families and communities and to Australian employers delivers a win-win for Australia and our partners in the Pacific.

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- Where genuine concerns are raised by workers about their workplace or accommodation, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) is able to move them to another PALM employer or require their employer to relocate them to alternative appropriate accommodation.
- The Government is committed to assessing the feasibility of workers electing to move employers within the PALM scheme. As this would be a significant change to the scheme, DEWR will consult closely with industry, unions and Pacific and Timor-Leste governments on any future reform.

PALM worker disengagement

- Many of the changes to the scheme, including new minimum hour and minimum net pay requirements, directly address some of the key drivers of disengagement – insufficient hours and not enough pay.
- The Government supports PALM workers to change employers where concerns arise in relation to their employer or place of employment.
- Visa condition 8611 (which is mandatory for the PALM scheme) imposes work limitations on a PALM visa, but it also allows workers to transfer between employers where such an arrangement has been endorsed by DEWR.
- Disengaged PALM workers found working for a non-approved employer under the PALM scheme are counselled in the first instance and referred to lead agencies, DFAT and DEWR, for reconnection into the program.

WHM

- The Working Holiday maker program promotes cultural exchange and boosts people-to-people connections between young adults from Australia and 50 partner countries. The program offers participants a 12 month holiday in Australia with the opportunity to partake in short term work and study.
- Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) are not required to work at all, but are allowed to work for the entire duration of their stay in Australia, in any location, industry and role they choose, generally for up to six months with any one employer.
- WHMs can choose to undertake three and six months of 'specified work' to become eligible to apply for a second and third WHM visa respectively. To be eligible, the work must be in a region, industry, and type specified for the relevant WHM visa subclass.
- WHMs who chose to work while in Australia are protected by the same workplace rights and laws as Australians, including minimum rates of pay and conditions.
- The Government takes all allegations of worker exploitation seriously will act immediately to investigate specific allegations raised with the Department, and where appropriate, refers matters to the relevant agencies, such as law enforcement and the Fair Work Ombudsman.

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The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for Home Affairs
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Minister for Cyber Security
Minister for the Arts
Leader of the House

Ref No: MC25-019628

Mr Liam O'Brien
Assistant Secretary
Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)
s. 47F(1)

Dear Mr O'Brien

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 June 2025 concerning recognition of foreign aircraft maintenance engineer licensing regimes in Australia. I appreciate the time you have taken to bring this matter to my attention.

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) ensures that skilled migrants meet the relevant criteria for entry and stay into Australia, and relies on the relevant Australian authorities to provide effective licencing regimes for all skilled workers where required in Australia. I understand that in this case the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) is responsible for the licencing regime for Aircraft Engineers.

I understand you, alongside fellow union officials met with my office and the Department in October to discuss these matters, including seeking exclusion of Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineers from the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL). These matters will be taken into consideration when I make my decision on the update to the CSOL, following the consultation and analysis undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia.

I have copied this letter to the Hon Catherine King MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government as the responsible Minister for CASA. I have written in similar terms to Mr David Henry, Mr Paul Farrow and Mr Glynn Sowter.

Thank you for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely

TONY BURKE

/ / 2025

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The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Minister for Cyber Security
Minister for the Arts
Leader of the House

Ref No: MC25-019628

Mr David Henry
Assistant National Secretary
Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU)
s. 47F(1)

Dear Mr Henry

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Ref No: MC25-019628

Mr Paul Farrow
National Secretary
Australian Workers Union (AWU)
s. 47F(1)

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TONY BURKE

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The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Minister for Cyber Security
Minister for the Arts
Leader of the House

Ref No: MC25-019628

Mr Glynn Sowter
General Manager
Australian Licenced Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA)
s. 47F(1)

Dear Mr Sowter

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 June 2025 concerning recognition of foreign aircraft maintenance engineer licensing regimes in Australia. I appreciate the time you have taken to bring this matter to my attention.

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) ensures that skilled migrants meet the relevant criteria for entry and stay into Australia, and relies on the relevant Australian authorities to provide effective licencing regimes for all skilled workers where required in Australia. I understand that in this case the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) is responsible for the licencing regime for Aircraft Engineers.

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TONY BURKE

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