

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Parliament of Australia
Email:

Subject: Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program

Dear Committee Members

The Cross Border Commissioners for New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria advocate for improved outcomes for communities located on and near the state's borders. These communities face unique administrative and regulatory barriers that affect workforce mobility, housing access, and pathways into critical sectors.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program. Skilled migration has long been a cornerstone of Australia's economic and social development, and its future design must reflect both national priorities and the practical realities faced by states and territories.

This submission highlights cross border challenges, including sponsorship restrictions, housing and infrastructure pressures, and vocational education pathways. It also offers practical recommendations for harmonised policies and collaborative approaches to ensure skilled migration delivers benefits across all jurisdictions.

1. Sponsor Migration Rules and Interstate Mobility

Current sponsorship arrangements under the **Skilled Nominated visa (Subclass 190)** and **Skilled Work Regional visa (Subclass 491)** require migrants to live and work in the nominating state or region for two to three years before becoming eligible for permanent residency. While these conditions support state workforce planning, they create unintended barriers when interstate mobility is required, particularly in border areas as these are often the one community.

Examples of Barriers:

- A Victorian-nominated migrant offered a critical role in NSW or South Australia within two years risks breaching nomination obligations to live and work in Victoria.
- Migrants sponsored for regional Victoria under Subclass 491 cannot relocate to regional South Australia without jeopardising their permanent residency pathway.
- State-specific occupation lists mean a health professional nominated in Victoria may not qualify for similar sponsorship in NSW or SA without reapplying under different criteria.

Impact:

These restrictions prevent skilled workers from moving to where shortages are most acute, create compliance risks for migrants, and reduce productivity for businesses with multi-jurisdictional projects.

Recommendations:

- Introduce national portability of sponsorship obligations to allow interstate movement without visa breaches.
- Harmonise occupation lists and nomination criteria across states.
- Establish interstate mobility agreements, similar to mutual recognition principles for professional accreditation.

Current Framework



Proposed Framework



Improving Interstate Mobility for Skilled Migrants

2. Housing and Infrastructure Alignment

Skilled migration contributes significantly to population growth and economic activity, but housing supply and infrastructure planning must keep pace. **The National Housing Accord** commits all levels of government to coordinated housing delivery to support population growth, including migration¹

Current Challenges:

- High-demand states such as Victoria and NSW face acute housing shortages, driving affordability pressures.
- Infrastructure projects often lag behind population growth, creating congestion and reducing liveability.
- Migration intake planning is not consistently integrated with housing and transport strategies at state level.

Impact:

Without alignment, skilled migration can exacerbate housing stress and infrastructure bottlenecks, undermining community support and economic benefits.

Recommendations:

- Embed migration intake planning within the National Housing Accord and state housing strategies.

¹ Commonwealth Migration Strategy 2024

- Develop a national migration housing dashboard to monitor supply demand trends and inform intake decisions.

3. Cross Border Issues Beyond Sponsorship

Interstate relocation for skilled migrants is often complicated by fragmented systems for accreditation, service access, and regional incentives.

Examples of Barriers:

- Professional Accreditation: Health professionals accredited in Victoria may face delays, cost and duplication of processes obtaining recognition in NSW or SA.
- Service Continuity: Eligibility for health and social services can vary by state, creating gaps when migrants move.
- Regional Incentives: Current regional migration incentives discourage mobility even when skills are urgently needed elsewhere.

Impact:

These inconsistencies reduce workforce flexibility, delay service delivery in critical sectors, and increase administrative burden for migrants and employers.

Recommendations:

- Create a national portability framework for professional accreditation, building on mutual recognition principles. If this cannot be achieved, pilot portability to Border Adjacent Local Government Areas (LGAs) to benefit border towns such as Albury-Wodonga, Echuca-Moama, Mildura-Wentworth and Bordertown-Kaniva.
- Harmonise eligibility rules for health and social services across states.
- Introduce a national regional migration incentive scheme that allows benefits to transfer across jurisdictions.

4. Targeting Skills Gaps and Boosting Innovation

Migration settings must be responsive to real-time labour market needs and support innovation-driven sectors.

Current Challenges:

- State occupation lists differ significantly, creating duplication and inefficiency.
- Critical shortages in health, construction, and technology persist despite targeted programs.
- Businesses in emerging industries struggle to access global talent quickly.

Impact:

Fragmented targeting reduces the effectiveness of skilled migration in addressing national priorities and limits Australia's competitiveness.

Recommendations:

- Develop a national critical skills list informed by real-time labour market data.
- Align state nomination programs with national priorities while allowing flexibility for local needs.
- Introduce fast-track pathways for sectors driving innovation (e.g., advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital technologies).

5. Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs)

DAMAs are an effective mechanism for addressing regional workforce shortages through place based and targeted skilled migration. They provide flexibility to meet local labour market needs, particularly in regions with complex and thin labour markets. Cross border areas fit these criteria, and maintaining DAMAs as an ongoing policy tool is essential.

Examples of Barriers:

- Limited awareness and administrative complexity reduce uptake, leaving critical shortages unresolved.
- DAMAs are not integrated with state migration strategies.

Impact:

- DAMAs enable tailored solutions for regions with unique labour market challenges, including cross border communities.
- Without DAMAs, employers in border regions face higher recruitment costs and delays, impacting service delivery and economic growth.

Recommendations:

- Retain DAMAs as a permanent feature of the skilled migration program.
- Streamline DAMA application and approval processes to improve responsiveness.
- Expand DAMA coverage to include cross border LGAs and pilot simplified arrangements for these areas.

Conclusion

Skilled migration is vital for Australia's prosperity. By addressing cross border challenges, harmonising sponsorship rules, and integrating housing and infrastructure planning, we can ensure the program meets national and state needs effectively while supporting businesses and communities.

As an initial step, this approach could be piloted in LGAs adjacent to state borders. This would enable greater workforce mobility in cross border settings, particularly in regions where workforce shortages are most acute, providing valuable insights before broader implementation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Kind Regards

Brett Davis

Cross Border Commissioner Victoria
15 December 2025

On behalf of

Ms Kelly Anne Saffin

Cross Border Commissioner (South Australia)

Ms Kalina Koloff

Cross Border Commissioner (New South Wales)