



Seafood Industry Australia

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia

Submitted [here](#), 16 Dec 2025

About SIA

Seafood Industry Australia (SIA) is the national peak-body representing the Australian seafood industry including the wild catch, aquaculture and post-harvest sectors with strong membership from each of these groups. We are the voice of Australian seafood industry.

SIA provides consumers, Government and other stakeholders with confident and united representation. Our mission is to Promote, Protect and Develop the Australian seafood industry on the national and international level.

The Australian seafood industry faces increasing economic pressure from a variety of sources including competition for ocean access, increasing compliance obligations, climate change and the cumulative impacts of government policy.

Industry and government recognized the need to collectively understand the social, economic, environmental and governance values associated with the industry. These insights help industry and government to understand the impact of decisions that change ocean access, what the breaking points are for seafood businesses and what can drive growth opportunities and business certainty. To address this issue SIA advocated for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCEEW), the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and the Blue Economy CRC to fund in 2024 the ground-breaking [Futures of Seafood](#) study.

This study has provided much needed clarity around the needs, size and importance of the Australian seafood industry. Calculations from the study estimate that:

- The Australian **seafood industry's GDP value has been estimated at \$11.9 billion.**
- **Our sector supports more than 79,491 Australian families**, many in rural and regional Australia.
- **Much of our sector's production is sold and consumed domestically, worth \$7.58 billion (GDP).** This means Australian consumers have access to a variety of high-quality Australian seafood all year round. With Country-of-Origin Labelling becoming mandatory in food service from 1 July 2026, the Australian consumer will for the first time be able to make informed purchase choices at both retail and food service outlets.
- Between them **Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria consume 71% of domestically produced seafood.**
- Australian **seafood exports are valued at \$1.27 billion (GDP)** dominated by lobster, tuna, abalone and salmon.
- The Australian seafood industry makes significant economic contributions to every state and territory except the ACT.

Please see Figure 1 below for more information.

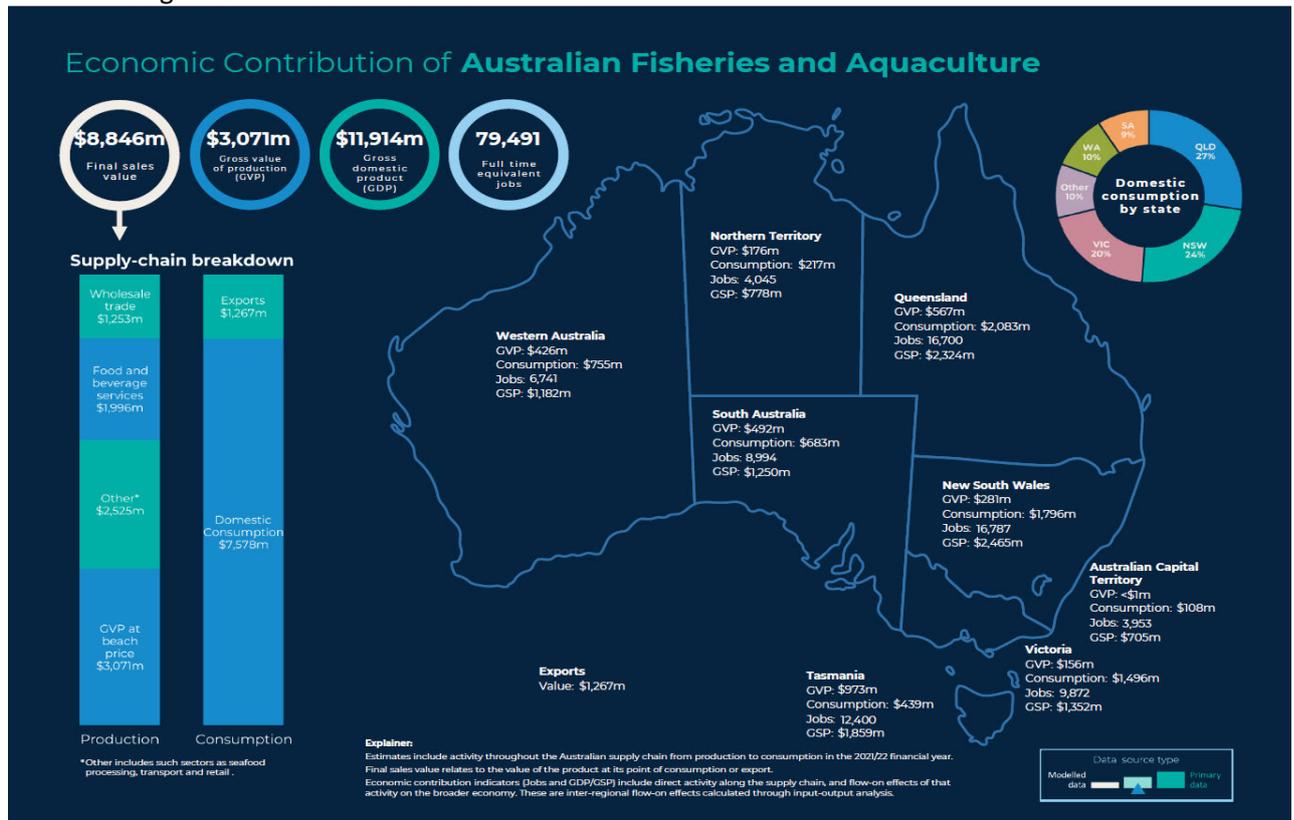


Figure 1: Economic contribution of Australia’s seafood industry (BDO 2025)

Our Pledge

Our industry is unity through SIA and this unity indicates that we love what we do, we stand by our products, and that our products are the best in the world.

We are the Australian seafood industry, and we are committed to putting the best Australian seafood on your table now and for generations to come. To ensure we do this in ways we are all proud of, we promise to:

- Actively care for Australia’s oceans and environment and work with others to do the same;
- Value our people, look after them and keep them safe;
- Respect the seafood we harvest and the wildlife we interact with;
- Be transparent and accountable for our actions;
- Engage with the community and listen to their concerns; and,
- Continually improve our practices.

This is our pledge to you.

Introduction

SIA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia.

People are the seafood industry's most valuable asset. **Our sector supports more than 79,491 Australian families**, many in rural and regional Australia (BDO 2025). We embrace diversity by employing a huge range of nationalities, genders, ages, education levels and skill sets. We are committed to putting the best Australian seafood on your table for generations to come. To ensure we do this in ways we are all proud of, we promise to value our people, look after them and keep them safe. We seek to position ourselves as an industry known for its conscientious, fair, and progressive employers.

Recommendations

1. Review and reform of Australia's migration program to ensure it is fit for purpose, addressing the outstanding recommendations from the from the 2023 Review of the Migration System.
2. Provision of training to all visa holders and their families regarding supports their rights and entitlements as migrant workers in Australian workplaces, and what action can be taken if they are not being treated ethically and lawfully.
3. Review and reform to the current visa framework to provide longer terms, greater access to a wider variety of migrant workers.
4. Implementation of the [National Agricultural Workforce Strategy](#)'s recommendations as a matter of priority to supercharge agricultural sectors growth and prosperity.
5. Urgent review/reform of the Skilling Australians Fund to support businesses and industry to direct and improve localised, regional training and to increase the accessibility and capabilities of RTO's. Challenges regarding training accessibility in regional areas must be addressed.

Background

Access to a sustainable workforce is the seafood sector's primary concern rather than where it is sourced from.

The Australian seafood has increasingly relied on the migration system to attract the workforce levels to safely and reliably harvest and produce the seafood Australia requires. The wild catch, aquaculture and post-harvest sectors all look to the migration system for adequate skills and labour to supplement their Australian workforce.

SIA maintains that migration provides the critical path to solving many of the short- and medium-term labour shortages facing the Australian seafood industry. It is well understood that the industry must take a proactive approach to improving the long-term prospects and value proposition of the industry for the next generation of Australian's. In the meantime, we need the support of a migrant workforce. Localised training capacity must be supported to develop the Australian and migrant worker community. Provision of on-the-job training can transform an unskilled worker into a skilled worker. Though it's noted that the Australian seafood industry requires skilled labour to improve productivity and unskilled labour to function.

SIA concurs with the 2023 [Review of the Migration System](#); Australia's migration program is not fit for purpose.

"Australia's migration system is broken, it is unstrategic, it is complex, expensive, it's slow ... It's not delivering for migrants and it's not delivering for the nation".

Extract from the 2023 [Review of the Migration System](#).

The current visa system focusses too heavily on attracting skilled labour through vocational lists. The vocational lists do not provide industry and employers with the flexibility and responsiveness that is required to respond to a changing industry and consumer landscape. The current visa framework unnecessarily limits the employment of families and support people to skilled visa holders. Increasingly industry is drawing on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, and the new permanent visa, the Pacific Engagement Visa, which commenced in July 2023 that will better support families.

Currently in Australia, 55 percent of the migrants coming into the country are the families of skilled migrants that are deemed to be acceptable to enter the visa program. Australia needs to document, support and encourage all migrants coming into the country to enter the workforce and improve the value and prosperity of their family unit.

The 2023 [Review of the Migration System](#) indicated there are more than 1.8 million temporary migrants living in Australia with the legal ability to participate in the labour market. SIA believes that government does not have the ability to identify, respond and process applications to address skills shortages in a meaningful and efficient way. Rather, echoing the sentiments expressed in the [National Agricultural Workforce Strategy](#), businesses and industry would be best to lead the assessment of skills shortages and be able to make the case as to its needs in their visa applications. The current approach is too prescriptive and disconnected from employer needs.

“The Skilled occupation lists underpinning the Employer Sponsorship programs are outdated and lack a strong evidence base. They do not reflect current or anticipated skilled labour needs”.

Extract from the 2023 [Review of the Migration System](#).

From the 2023 [Review of the Migration System](#), SIA calls out the following recommendations as particularly important for the seafood sector:

Recommendation 2. Ensure a single area of government, with deep expertise, is charged with stewarding the migration system, with all visa products to be designed and delivered by that department.

Recommendation 7. Work across government to consider how best migration can help meet place-based objectives, particularly in regional Australia.

Recommendation 16. Adopt risk-based regulation of temporary labour migration.

Recommendation 17. Allow temporary migrant workers to move from their current employment to find work with another employer within the same sector or job family.

Recommendation 18. Require all employers of temporary visa holders to register that employment through a light-touch process; those with a history of serious workplace breaches would be deregistered and ineligible to employ visa holders.

Recommendation 19. Require employer fees and charges to be paid monthly, rather than up-front, to facilitate mobility between employers and increase access for small business by reducing up-front costs.

Recommendation 20. Provide migrant workers with targeted training on workplace laws and conditions based on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme model.

Recommendation 32. Revisit the scope of settlement and integration support programs, with a view to making them more responsive to local differences in settlement location, and migrant need.

Recommendation 35. Lead alongside states and territories a strategy to oversee efforts to streamline skills recognition, particularly for those occupations that can deliver the most benefit to Australia.

Recommendation 38. Undertake a phased program of legislative review and reform.

In considering the use of skilled migration, there should be recognition that many rural industries remain dependent on flexible, non-skilled labour, and policies should reflect that reality.

Thank you

SIA, on behalf of our members and the entire Australian seafood industry, would like to thank you for taking the time to review our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Veronica Papacosta
CEO, Seafood Industry Australia Ltd

References

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