

For the inquiry into migration in regional Australia 2019

Summary

I am from a regional area and I have first-hand knowledge of my area as well as a short time spent farming in regional SA. I am also in the process of migrating to Australia. Newcomers need special protection from bad employers. They also need to feel equal among their peers. Regions are special areas that need special consideration.

About Myself

I grew up in a rural Canada. My family farms crops like wheat, corn, and apples. We use offshore labourers for the apples because locals wouldn't be able to stand the working conditions and pay. Farm work is skilled in its own way and requires training and knowledge, it's no place for temporary or unreliable workers. It is almost impossible to find someone willing to farm, not even myself and I grew up with it.

I did spend three months farm in Peebinga, South Australia to extend my 417 visa. It is not that I cannot easily find work, in fact I am trained as a Metal Machinist, a trade on your skills shortage. I am just short of points for the 189 Skilled Independent Visa because I would need a perfect IELTS score - even for an English-speaking Canadian I am not so sure. I would not consider the regional skilled visa. My Australian fiancé would not speak to me again!

Worker's Rights

Migrants need to be protected from abuse. New migrants and refugees are some of society's most vulnerable. They may be new to the customs here and they do not enjoy local connection with extended family or friends. They may not know their rights; that their employer cannot underpay them, make them live in unsuitable conditions (which I did - mice and their droppings everywhere when I arrived!), give them no days off, etc. They should be made aware that they will not be punished or lose their jobs for speaking up against an injustice.

Skilled workers are needed in regional areas, temporary visas like 417 provide no long term benefit to regional areas and no predictable outcomes for employers. Farm work, though not seen as "skilled" does usually require mechanical aptitude, resilience, good coordination and physical fitness. Farm managers have the repeated frustration of having trained backpackers only for them to leave after their three month obligation, replaced by someone totally green.

Freedom of Movement

No one tells an Aussie where they can live, right? If the government wishes to populate regional areas to relieve population pressures from cities they should do so with the realisation that they may be starting these new Aussies at a disadvantage - though not in all cases (I believe regional migration would be best with an employer arrangement).

Regional areas pose challenges different to many urban areas, mostly because of size. Regions tend to be poorer. Fewer people means fewer resources are spread over large areas. The job pool is much smaller in the regions and employers are likely to be aware of each other -unscrupulous employers may make your life hell (I was yelled at everyday -Worker's Rights). Public transportation is limited and sometimes non-existent. Families and individuals will likely be burdened financially with the purchase of a vehicle (or vehicles) and registration. Housing options are more limited as well, though it is cheaper. Those requiring specialised healthcare are at a real disadvantage because specialist doctors may not live and work in their area. They could be faced with lengthy car trips if they have health conditions.

Diversity

Diversity is as important in regional areas as anywhere else. People need to engage with others different to themselves so they learn not to dehumanise or demonise those foreign to themselves without having personal experience. New people and their communities need to get involved with one another. There needs to be interaction and a welcoming attitude on everyone's part to start off right. Volunteering or festivities may help encourage community.

Loneliness kills. Loneliness is ever present in cities and regions alike, it leads to depression and many other negative mental and physical impacts in one's own life. I was lucky to interact with locals in SA, but those with fewer social (or even language) skills may suffer more with their mental health. Nominating a volunteer to guide them in everyday Aussie life may prove helpful -fair dinkum. Having available mental health workers would be good for everyone in the community, though the stigma needs to be removed.

Treating the symptom

The cities should not push their population problems into the regions. They should instead be dealing with them head on for the long-term sake of the nation. Australia has roughly the same population as the island of Taiwan but over a much larger area. It is the vastness of this country that is part of the problem. Over-crowding and congestion of cities is a symptom of urban sprawl. Melbourne's CBD is compact, the buildings surrounding the main CBD are low-rise dwellings spreading into the horizon. Lower population density discourages good public transport, it's inefficient, and creates greater distances to travel for work and leisure. If our cities' footprints were smaller car travel would be less necessary and therefore there would be less vehicle congestion and less pollution. Increasing density seems counter-intuitive, but it really isn't -it's efficient. Development of natural areas and farmland is

not undone. It endangers habitats and wildlife as well as food production (a former farmer knows).
Development of the regional areas will bring city problems to the regions.

Thank you for taking my letter into consideration.