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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via migration@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

Australian Pork Ltd (APL) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia.

APL is the national industry representative body for Australian pork producers. APL is a producer-owned company responsible for marketing, export market access, research, innovation and extension, and strategic policy advocacy to assist in securing a profitable and sustainable future for the Australian pork industry.

During 2024, the Australian pork industry contributed more than \$6.9 billion to the Australian economy. This figure represents the over-arching contribution to the economy including primary and secondary processing. The industry produced 470,502 metric tonnes of pork. All fresh pork in Australia is domestically sourced, with around 85% of Australian pork produced used domestically and the high value export market taking 57,294 metric tonnes during the 2024 calendar year.

APL holds several official roles on behalf of the Australian pork industry, including:

- The Rural Research and Development Corporation for the industry. Established through Federal legislation, APL is responsible for leading research, development, and extension in partnership with the Australian government and the research community. Our statutory obligation is to deliver industry innovation and research and development services on behalf of all industry levy payers.
- The market access, trade and marketing arm of the industry, including managing industry campaigns such as "Get some pork on your fork".
- The national peak body for the Australian pork industry. We represent pork producers and the supply chain across jurisdictions and within national and state and territory representative frameworks.
- Leading the Australian pork industry's Sustainability Framework implementation, supporting benchmarking and accountability against the goals within the four sustainability pillars.
- The pork industry signatory to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Deed (EADRA), representing the entire pork supply chain within Animal Health Australia, and where required, within the decision-making structures which would manage an emergency animal disease response.

a) The ongoing economic, social and cultural value of skilled migration to Australia

Migrants settling in regional communities provide significant benefits to society by stimulating the economy, alleviating population decline, filling labour shortages, boosting school enrolments and enriching cultural diversity.¹

The Australian pork industry employs more than 36,000 people in Australia and contributes \$6.9 billion to the Australian economy.² The industry does however face significant challenges attracting and retaining labour and requires an increasingly skilled workforce due to the technical and integrated nature of the pork supply chain. These shortages are exacerbated by the diminishing labour supply in regional Australia.

APL's most recent survey of pork producers found that approximately 60% reported a shortfall of staff. The survey results indicated that labour deficits have primarily been caused by poor social perceptions of the industry, including that a career in the pork industry is unrewarding, non-technical and has limited career pathways. This perception has continued despite considerable investment in developing educational resources for use in schools and ongoing work to promote the broad range of employment opportunities, the career pathways and highly skilled nature of many roles. As a consequence, Senior Stockperson Piggery remains on the latest Australian Government Occupations Shortage List.³

The Australian pork industry is now a highly technical, specialised and dynamic industry, relying on skilled people with responsibility for:

- technical animal husbandry procedures including artificial insemination,
- management of herd health and biosecurity,
- nutrition, growth and productivity,
- innovation in automation and robotics,
- sustainable energy and feed waste utilisation.

Pig farms require a highly proficient workforce with skills in, for example, engineering and energy science. The development and implementation of this technology has had a profound impact on the depth of skills and abilities required across the agricultural workforce.

Access to skilled migration is therefore crucial to the industry's response to the challenge of varying labour availability and accessing the skills required to manage Australian piggeries. Without this access, the supply of highly skilled workers from overseas would be removed resulting in a restricted skilled labour market for pig producers and compounding the existing issue of acquiring suitably qualified local labour.

The Australian pork industry's workforce across the supply chain is skilled, specialised and generally engaged on a permanent basis. To ensure a sustainable future, the industry must be supported by effective employment programs, a responsive migration system, and regional development policies and investment that ensure regional areas are attractive places to live and work.

b) The effectiveness of current skilled migration settings in meeting the current and future needs of the states and territories, while recognising the ongoing need for housing and infrastructure.

The Australian pork industry is central to Australia's food supply, economic resilience, and regional vitality. All fresh pork consumed in Australia is domestically sourced, making the pork industry a cornerstone of Australia's national food security. APLs submission to The Australian Governments' National Food Security Strategy highlighted the

¹ Regional migration and settlement: Putting down roots to revitalise regional communities in Australia. 2023

² ACIL Allen. 2024 Economic Contribution of the Australian Pork Industry

³ <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-shortages-analysis/occupation-shortage-list>

importance of maintaining domestic food production, processing, and manufacturing capabilities while acknowledging vulnerabilities within Australia's food supply chain.

The agriculture sector is an important source of economic and employment opportunity for regional Australia and enables a strong social fabric within these communities. However, a career in agriculture, and specifically the pork industry, often requires employees and their families to relocate and live remotely away from services that are often taken for granted in urban settings. Families can face limited access to schooling, centres of employment for partners, health care and shopping centres. While remuneration rates in the pork industry are competitive and often subject to considerable increases over short periods of time, the current workforce demands more than just competitive pay to live and work remotely.

In its report to the Australian Government⁴, Jobs and Skill Australia (JSA) identified that a significant proportion of the food supply chain work is located in regional, rural and remote Australia. These labour markets are experiencing acute skill shortages and face complex challenges around accommodation and housing, transportation and services.

Settlement issues (housing, schooling, transport, community integration) impact both attraction and retention rates, particularly for those employees wanting to bring their dependents. Access to English language support and training for migrants is currently inadequate.

While noting the complexities of improved housing availability and affordability, the lack of affordable rental accommodation poses significant challenges for migrant workers, particularly in regional areas. Compounding this issue is that some rental agencies are hesitant to accept international candidates as leaseholders, often requiring employers to be named as the primary person on rental agreements. Standardised reporting and proactive education, addressing housing challenges and providing pastoral support are crucial for the wellbeing of migrant workers.

JSA noted that there is a genuine opportunity to rethink the current patchwork of migration pathways available to the food supply chain. However, given high levels of reliance on current pathways in parts of the workforce, changes will need to be approached carefully to avoid unintended consequences for employers and workers. Reforms must:

- *maximise the utilisation of investments by ensuring industry and community organisation collaboration with the overarching goal being to ensure investments actively support migrant workers and ensure improved settlement and integration outcomes.*
- *improve settlement support accompanied by greater general infrastructure investment in regional areas such as daycare, healthcare and transport infrastructure.*
- *ensure improved access to reputable English language testing providers.*

c) The scope to more effectively target skills gaps and shortages in critical sectors to improve services that benefit Australian communities

There is an opportunity for the Federal Government to support a regionalisation agenda, underpinned by appropriate levels of investment, to provide economic and social infrastructure to ensure equitable access to opportunities. Examples are adequate and affordable accommodation, roads, transport and electricity infrastructure, connectivity and services (health, childcare and education).

The Federal Government has an opportunity to continue to prioritise, with urgency, efforts to deliver a more responsive, efficient and cost-effective migration program. Reforms must:

- *recognise the importance of agriculture to Australia's economy and food security and ensure agriculture and its post farm gate occupations are highest priority for visa processing.*
- *reduce food security supply chain impacts from a shortage of labour availability.*

⁴ An Essential Ingredient: The Food Supply Chain Workforce. 2025

- *ensure appropriate migration pathways, with clear processes to permanent residency, are available to support agriculture and rural and regional Australia's workforce needs.*

d) The scope for skilled migration settings to more effectively support Australian businesses, boost productivity and encourage innovation.

The skilled migration settings can be adjusted to more effectively support Australian businesses. Within the pork industry, as described earlier in the submission, there is a significant role for skilled migration settings to support innovation and build the industry productivity. Reforms must:

- *ensure there is investment in the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy.*
- *ensure there is active collaboration with the diverse sectors within Australian agriculture to better understand the challenges being faced by the different sectors.*
- *be supported by accurate labour and skills data utilising agreed industry data and reducing the risk of inappropriate assumptions being incorporated into key data sets.*
- *acknowledge the importance of and be supported by cross agency coordination.*

Overarching APL recommendations

There are significant opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the migration settings and recognise the critical role migration plays in supporting Australian agricultural productivity and the rural and regional communities where most agriculture is based.

- *The Federal Government to work collaboratively with agricultural industries to reflect the essential nature of Australian agriculture in the national primary and secondary curriculums to build greater awareness among school students to assist in the development of our future workforce.*
- *The Federal Government to coordinate with State/Territory governments to support investment in agricultural workforce and training 'hubs' in rural and regional Australia to connect employees with agricultural employers, and to support training needs.*
- *Expenditure of the Skilling Australians Fund should be invested in programs that benefit the agricultural industries who contribute to it via effective upskilling initiatives, supported by transparent investment and clear monitoring and evaluation.*

APL commends the government for establishing the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to inquire into Australia's skilled migration program and looks forward to ongoing dialogue on this important initiative. Please contact Tanya Pittard, General Manager Policy and Industry Engagement, to discuss any matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Margo Andrae
Chief Executive Officer