

Dear Sir

We would like to express our dismay and utter disbelief that a civilised and democratic country such as Australia could even consider the proposed Amendment to the Migration Act. We can understand the need to manage the current backlog of migration applications, although this is in part due to the government's own policies, but this Amendment if passed will not only damage Australia's reputation internationally, have a detrimental effect on the economy and, on a personal level cause untold pain and hardship for many thousands of people who have called Australia home for a number of years.

My wife found out 6 years ago that she had an older full sister who was adopted at birth and brought to Australia by her new family when she was 3 years old. As a result of this discovery, we took the decision to start a new life in Australia in order for them to develop their relationship. Although we both had good jobs, our formal qualifications in these fields, whilst supposedly being of a sufficient level for migration, were not recognised as being such by Vetassess. As a result of this we took the decision for my wife to retrain as a hairdresser here in Australia which at the time was deemed to be an occupation in demand and worth 60 points. We were assured that on completion of this course we could apply for permanent residency and that so long as additional criteria were met such as medicals, police checks etc this would prove to be a formality.

We sold our house in the UK to finance both the course and our living expenses for the next 2 years as we knew that we had to support ourselves for the duration. On arriving here in May 2007 my wife started her course and I began to look for work, although the work restrictions imposed on us made this extremely difficult. As part of her qualification, my wife had to gain work experience and for the best part of a year worked in a hairdressing salon for nothing even though at the time we had no income other than our savings. At the end of her course she obtained a positive skills assessment, we passed our medicals and submitted our application for permanent residency on a sponsored visa using my wife's sister at the beginning of November 2008. However she was unable to find employment within hairdressing as coming from a private college she had little industry experience compared to school leavers working under the apprenticeship scheme. She did find some part time work within a barbers which allowed her to practice her cutting skills, although barbering is apparently deemed to be a completely different occupation from hairdressing. After doing this for 6 months she found full time employment close to where we live in a secretarial and project administration role, a job which her boss had been unable to fill for some time locally. In the time we have been here I have worked a number of part time, casual and temporary roles as a result of the temporary nature of our visa. I started work in January for the Queensland government in a similar role to one I worked in the UK again on a temporary basis but with a long term view to make this permanent. My department is joining the Commonwealth on July 1 and due to my current visa, I am having to leave although I can re-apply when any vacancies are advertised probably in 4 months time.

We arrived with the profits from our house sale in the UK and decided to build here with that money, and although every cent we had went into it we now have a home that we love. We have made a life for ourselves here, made new friends and are trying to help make our community a better place. At times over the last 3 years with little or no income

or support we have struggled financially and more recently, struggled emotionally with the news that our application has been put on hold, but we have stuck in there because we feel that the way of life and values here are worth fighting to hold on to. Despite the restrictions imposed on us we have both worked to support ourselves and due to the fact we are unable to leave the country every cent we have earned has gone straight back into the Australian economy.

As you can understand moving to another country is not a decision to take lightly but we were assured that under the migration programme and laws at the time of our application here there would be no nasty surprises. This proposed Amendment I think qualifies as a 'nasty surprise'. When we applied we understood that there were certain requirements to be met under Australian migration law and have worked towards fulfilling these. How can the government justifiably now propose to apply the new amendments retrospectively? I can understand it if any future applications for certain visas are put on hold or the categories changed, but to do it for those of us already living here and in the system is patently unfair. At the time we applied hairdressing was on the in demand list and should our visa have been granted in the 6 months we were told it would take, it would still have been on the list. However, the government decided to put general skilled migration on hold whilst still accepting new applications and as a result has created the backlog of cases, many of which are for occupations no longer on the new critical skills list.

Most of us that find ourselves in this predicament have lived in Australia now for a number of years and as such have made new lives for ourselves. All of us have chosen to live here for whatever reason, are committed to this country and are no doubt looking forward to the day when we can truly call ourselves Australian. In the meantime we are contributing to our local communities and society as a whole whilst earning and spending money here. As I understand it the international education sector injects some \$18 billion into the economy so accepting this Amendment will not only affect us directly but be detrimental to the nation as a whole as word will spread to other potential migrants that Australia is not a place to go to.

We would like to think that in the end commonsense will prevail and Australia's reputation for giving everyone a fair go will not be irrevocably damaged. We are not expecting or asking to be treated as special cases, just that we are treated fairly and justly and our applications are processed in the manner they were supposed to be when we submitted them. We may not be Australian citizens yet but we are all citizens of Australia, this is our home and these are our lives that are being toyed with.

Yours Sincerely

Debbie and Mark Simpson