



DUBBO REGIONAL COUNCIL  
Office of the Mayor  
Councillor Ben Shields

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16 September 2019

Joint Standing Committee On Migration  
PO Box 6021 Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

### **SUBMISSION - REGIONAL MIGRATION INQUIRY**

Dubbo Regional Council was proclaimed by the NSW Government on 12 May 2016 following the amalgamation of the former Dubbo City and Wellington Councils. The Dubbo Region is located in the Orana Region and is the forefront of regional growth, investment and opportunity. The Region is experiencing significantly low unemployment rates while substantial capital projects and investment are forecast and skills attraction and workforce development is key to maintaining positive economic growth through what is a significant period of drought effecting Dubbo and surrounding regions.

I am happy to provide a response to the Governments Regional Migration Inquiry, providing context from Regional NSW in relation to existing migration trends, migration support and skills shortages.

In the past, migration into the Dubbo Region has mostly been represented by Skilled or Sponsored Migration Visas, facilitated through the local Orana, Regional Development Australia. Feedback provided through to staff within the Council organisation is that applicants are moving to Dubbo as the major centre within the Regional sponsored area (Orana) and typically these applicants are looking to make their homes in city locations, not smaller towns. The understanding of distance between locations and jobs within the Orana is something which has also been a challenge in the past, with some new members of our communities believing they can live in the larger centre of Dubbo, but work daily in the outlying towns such as Nyngan, Cobar or Warren – which are significant commute distances of over 100km, with no public transport to support that type working arrangement.

Directly addressing the Terms of Reference the Dubbo Regional Council make the following comments regarding the attraction of migrants as part of general new resident and skills attraction to the Dubbo Region.

CORRESPONDENCE TO BE ADDRESSED TO:

PO Box 81 Dubbo NSW 2830

Civic Administration Building Church St Dubbo NSW 2830

[W dubbo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dubbo.nsw.gov.au) [W mayorofdubbo.com.au](http://www.mayorofdubbo.com.au)



### **Strategies to develop regional skilled migration**

As part of overall population and economic growth Dubbo Regional Council is committed to programs and initiatives that drive overall industry growth of the city with a focus on business and workforce development and attraction. This supports investment in the region across people, places and productivity. Dubbo Regional Council does not focus on migrant support as part of its program delivery as it is focused on skills and workforce development and support based on industry. As part of the activities of Council in the area of new resident attraction the following initiatives do provide a level of support to immigration as part of the general integration into the Dubbo Region community.

The following campaigns are delivered by Council.

#### *Dubbo Regional Council, New Resident Attraction Program*

- Overall marketing the Region as a lifestyle alternative to Sydney and metropolitan cities. Always on market positioning of Dubbo in particular as a Regional City with amenities and services that are reflective of the larger capital cities and promoting the wider Dubbo Region as an attractive place for skilled workers to relocate with time for people to spend with their families, on their careers or with friends.
- Through the provision of an online customer relationship management (CRM) system, Council provides detailed and personalised information on the Region to potential new residents who enquire. This includes information on medical, schooling and retail and hospitality services along with real estate options, regional economic data and the promotion of jobs and skills. Council also supports the cross promotion of relevant migrant support organisations such as RDA Orana and the Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre.
- All new residents captured through the CRM are invited to 3 New Resident Events in the Region throughout the year, open to all residents new to the Region in the past 12 months, these events are hosted by myself as the Mayor and designed to encourage connection with the community and relevant services. Council's Program invites partnering organisations and community groups to the new resident events to facilitate connection. Invites are also extended to not for profit community groups such as Buninyong Play Group and ORISCON – Orana Residents of Indian Subcontinental Heritage which provide specific support to migrant families within the Dubbo Region community.

### **Local volunteers, employers and community organisations and their role in facilitating regional settlement.**

Council is aware of many local businesses, including our own Organisation that are employing skilled migrants within the region. Employers with strong in house training and mentoring programs have been much more successful in this type of skills attraction, these include large

businesses such as Fletchers International, Woolworths and fast-food chains who have strong in house training programs and budgets to support additional workforce development.

For other businesses the recruitment guidelines within their organisation see many skilled applicants not making interview stages due to their applications not meeting selection criteria. Connection between business needs and skills gaps and the migrant employee market needs more facilitation from a broader sense in order to be more generally successful in migrant conversation to employment in local industry.

Connecting Community Services (Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre) offers programs to support migrants within the Dubbo Region, the centre has a Migrant Support Officer and holds playgroups, English classes and Women's groups. Programs are being delivered to meet the following needs within the migrant community;

- Young children who are school ready or early years of education need support with their English proficiency, as English is not the language used at home. The Early Learning/Preschool framework is not understood by migrating families.
- Family members may require further English literacy but this comes at a cost not necessarily seen as a priority. Literacy can affect applications for drivers licence and job applications.
- Connecting stay at home parents with the community

In the same vein, ORISCON is a cultural diversity group which is a volunteer based and not for profit organisation with the objective of engaging migrant families within the community for cultural connectivity and diversity. Consisting of community members who have migrated from Indian Sub-Continental nations and countries (but not limited to) Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia to celebrate and share with one another their rich cultural heritage.

Council recognises the significance of connection to community and involve these community groups across many aspects of its community engagement programs.

### **Relevant migration policy, including administration and state specific migration mechanisms;**

Whilst Dubbo Regional Council conducts a more holistic New Resident Attraction Program, as detailed above, Council supports Regional Development Australia (RDA) Orana, as the Regional Certifying Body (RCB) for migration and sponsorship in the Orana Region in New South Wales. RDA Orana provide skilled migration services as part of the strategy for regional workforce planning and development. RDA Orana is the Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) for the Orana Region which covers approximately 25% of NSW's land mass and includes 12 Local Government Areas.

Dubbo Regional Council has provided support in writing to RDA Orana during its application for DAMA for the Orana Region with consideration given to RDA's role in providing skills

matching and business support for the integration of migrant skilled workers into the LGA and the wider Orana Region. Council has worked with RDA Orana by sharing of data and industry information to identify skills gaps in the Dubbo Region which could be supported through targeted migration frameworks.

Separate to the terms of reference, the Dubbo Region is a welcoming community and has supported the integration of many cultures into our sporting clubs, work environments, social groups and events. Whilst the formal framework for cultural integration has not been a specific focus for Council as a government entity, Council does support many initiatives of the many cultures that make up the LGA. These have included the DREAM Festival, the Dubbo Multi-Cultural Festival, Fong Lees Lane in Wellington and use of community centre programs such as those delivered through the Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre.

It is important to Dubbo Regional Council that any frameworks put into place by the Government are relevant to the skills shortages within the area and take into consideration the different lifestyle and work requirements that are available throughout Regional areas and that sponsorship, support and attraction packages are not only relevant to the migrant community but also to the Region in which placement is to take place. Council is supportive of an industry matching or business sponsorship model that connects workers to jobs rather than general approach to industry attraction where employment presents as a challenge in new community members specific skill set.

This is an important issue for Regional Australia, should you wish to discuss any of my comments further please contact the office as I am happy to continue this conversation as part of the overall inquiry.

Yours faithfully

*Councillor Ben Shields*  
Mayor