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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
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Parliament House
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By email: migration@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee

Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia

Skilled migration is essential to Australia's economic resilience, global competitiveness and clean energy future.

By modernising migration settings, streamlining pathways, and activating existing talent, Australia can secure the skills that drive innovation, sustain regional communities, and reinforce our position as a global leader in critical industries including mining and minerals processing.

In this context, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia is critical in ensuring Australia continues to attract and retain the skills that underpin national prosperity, global competitiveness and the clean energy transition.

As Australia's largest industry, the minerals sector remains a cornerstone of Australia's economy, regional employment and a reliable supplier of quality minerals to the world.

Its significant contribution to national prosperity and strategic capability is built on hundreds of thousands of highly paid, highly skilled and secure jobs, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Australia's mining industry cannot survive, grow and prosper without skilled migration, which sustains economic growth, fills labour gaps and supports the sector's role as a cultural and social anchor in regional communities.

Without skilled migration, labour shortages especially in critical and hard to fill specialised roles would put project timelines, export earnings, and the broader national economy at risk.

Employing Australians will always be the first priority of the minerals industry. At the same time, skilled migration fills urgent workforce needs, complements domestic training and supports long-term growth.

This submission provides an overview of the economic, social, and cultural value of skilled migration to Australian mining and identifies opportunities to change the nation's migration settings to strengthen responsiveness and maximise impact.

In brief, settings should be changed to:

- Restore responsiveness and streamline pathways
- Enhance retention and regional focus
- Activate existing talent and streamline recognition
- Fast-track critical skills pipelines
- Measure outcomes and maximise impact.

Economic contribution

Modelling by the Australian government's Department of the Treasury in the 2023 Intergenerational Report confirms skilled migrants are net fiscal contributors, adding billions to economy (gross domestic product, or GDP) annually because they are typically younger and more educated than the average population.

In mining, their impact is clear: although skilled migrants comprise just 1.24 per cent of the workforce, their contribution is critical. Since June 2020, numbers have more than doubled, rising 122 per cent from 1,700 in 2020 to 3,880 in 2025. With an average remuneration of \$149,600 – the highest of any industry – these roles underscore the economic value of skilled migration.

Strategic importance

Australia is positioning itself as a global leader in critical minerals for clean energy and advanced technologies including defence.

Skilled migration ensures the workforce can adapt to new technologies and global demand. Engineers, geologists, metallurgists, and processing specialists from overseas help Australia's minerals industry scale up exploration and refining capacity.

Without their expertise, Australia risks falling behind in the global race for battery and renewable supply chains.

Social and cultural impact

The minerals industry is deeply embedded in Australia's national identity as a driver of prosperity and resilience since the gold rush of the 1850s.

As Australia experiences the immense benefits of the modern minerals boom, migrants reinforce this legacy by bringing diverse traditions and perspectives into mining communities, enriching regional towns and sustaining their vitality.

Their presence strengthens Australia's ambition to be a reliable supplier to allies such as the US, Japan, and the EU, reinforcing trade and geopolitical partnerships while deepening cultural exchange.

The effectiveness of current skilled migration settings

The mining sector is facing a workforce crunch as demand for talent intensifies while nearly half of skilled mining engineers in mining are expected to retire within the next decade.

Skilled workers are already in high demand for infrastructure projects, the 2032 Brisbane Olympics the defence sector and growth in emerging sectors such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, AI and cybersecurity. Meanwhile, Australian mining cannot find enough people to fill critical roles including mining, geotechnical and processing engineers, metallurgists, geologists, electricians, mine surveyors, diesel fitters and drillers.

While the Skills in Demand Visa, particularly the Specialist Stream (income threshold \$135,000) and Core Stream (covering more than 30 minerals-related occupations), is well-targeted, structural weaknesses including a lack of administrative staff and delays in credential recognition and processing times continue to undermine the integrity and effectiveness of skilled migration pathways.

Australia has significant scope to improve skilled migration outcomes by activating the full potential of migrants already residing in the country.

In 2023, Engineers Australia reported that more than 100,000 qualified engineers were employed in fields unrelated to engineering, including for example driving for Uber.

This represents a substantial loss of productivity and innovation capacity at the very time when mining, clean energy and advanced technology sectors face acute skills shortages.

Supporting businesses, productivity and innovation

A more open, responsive, and streamlined skilled migration policy is required to fill critical workforce gaps, align intake with industry needs and strengthen Australia's global competitiveness.

Current settings cannot cope with dynamic demand in sectors such as mining, clean energy, and advanced technology. Businesses face escalating shortages in engineers, geologists, metallurgists, information and communications technology specialists, and trades, while global competitors actively attract the same talent.

To remain competitive, Australia must position itself as a destination of choice for highly skilled professionals by offering clear, simple, and predictable pathways to permanent residency. Skilled migration should not only meet immediate workforce needs but also serve as a pillar of our nation's future through stronger long-term economic growth, regional communities and an innovation culture. This means tackling structural barriers that currently weaken the integrity and purpose of migration pathways.

Australia's skilled migration intake is intended to align with industry needs, but in reality, responsiveness is weakened by slow updates, credential barriers, and settlement constraints. Mining, clean energy and technology sectors are all frustrated and impeded by these weaknesses, as their demand for specialised skills is growing faster than migration pathways can adapt.

Enhancing public awareness and understanding

Australia can strengthen public awareness of skilled migration by highlighting its economic, social, and cultural contributions in ways that connect directly to everyday community experiences. Skilled migration is often discussed in technical or policy terms, but its importance is far from visible to the public, making it more difficult to build broader understanding and support.

Strategies should emphasise that while Australian companies employ Australians as a priority, in some cases skilled migration is needed to supplement domestic workers and training and that it supports strategic national goals. Examples include:

- National storytelling campaigns: share compelling stories of skilled migrants working in mining, clean energy, healthcare, and technology, showing how their expertise supports local communities, Australia's prosperity and key industries
- Education and schools: integrate migration's proud and rich history and important modern role into curricula, highlighting Australia's history as a migrant nation and the modern contribution of skilled workers to innovation and prosperity
- Media partnerships: work across various media channels at national, regional and local level on a long-term campaign that shows the audience the power of skilled migration in building and sustaining industries and communities.

Lessons from other countries with similar migration objectives

International experience offers valuable lessons for Australia in shaping a more effective skilled migration framework.

Other countries have shown how targeted selection, streamlined recognition, fast-track pathways, employer accreditation and regional empowerment can sharpen responsiveness, lift quality and sustain communities.

- Targeted selection builds adaptability: for example, Canada increasingly uses targeted draws for in-demand occupations. Data-driven, occupation-specific selection can sharpen responsiveness while still preserving human capital weighting for long-term adaptability.
- Recognition reform unlocks productivity: international experience shows streamlining recognition is a shared priority. Australia has historically delivered stronger earnings outcomes than Canada for regulated professions, showing that effective credential recognition and matching processes are central to maximising migrant contributions

- Fast-track routes for faster critical skills delivery: Singapore's ONE Pass and the UK's Global Talent route demonstrate the value of frictionless pathways, sometimes including accelerated permanent residency. Streamlined routes are critical to securing talent in pipelines for key industries such as mining, AI, advanced manufacturing, health and clean energy
- Regionalisation sustains communities: provincial nomination programs abroad illustrate how regional empowerment can balance settlement and demand. Tools like regional compacts linked to verified shortages and settlement capacity can strengthen mining towns and regional economies.

The lesson for Australia is clear: a more agile and targeted system will secure the skills that drive innovation, lift productivity and reinforce the nation's position in the global economy, particularly in mining where leadership is critical to long-term prosperity.

Recommendations

Restore responsiveness and streamline pathways

Driving responsiveness and unlocking pathways will secure global talent, remove barriers and ensure skilled migration strengthens Australia's competitiveness and productivity:

- Align intake with verified industry needs to ensure skilled migration directly supports national growth and strategic priorities
- Fast-track permanent residency routes to attract and retain global talent, giving Australia a competitive edge in securing expertise
- Compete globally for in-demand skills by positioning Australia as a destination of choice for innovators and specialists
- Eliminate structural barriers by cutting processing delays, simplifying requirements and modernising administration so skilled migration can supercharge competitiveness and productivity.

Enhance retention and regional focus

Empowering states and territories through flexible regional compacts and embedding clear residency, family, and settlement supports will secure long-term skilled migrant commitment, stabilise regional workforces and sustain vibrant communities.

- Activate regional compacts that give states and territories flexible nomination quotas directly tied to verified local shortages and settlement capacity, ensuring migration intake responds to real workforce needs while strengthening regional economies
- Secure long-term commitment in regional and remote workplaces by embedding retention scaffolding: set clear permanent residency timelines to provide certainty, expand family pathways to deepen community integration, and deliver settlement supports such as housing, healthcare, and credential recognition services. These measures reduce churn, stabilise workforces, and sustain vibrant regional communities.

Activate existing talent and streamline recognition

Mobilising existing migrant talent, accelerating credential recognition and setting realistic, transparent and measurable outcomes will unlock productivity, reduce underemployment and ensure skilled migration delivers maximum value to Australia's workforce:

- Mobilise existing migrant talent by introducing targeted industry incentives for work experience placements and structured mentoring. These initiatives build networks, strengthen employability, and make current and future skilled migrants' job-ready with realistic expectations

- Accelerate licensure and credential assessment through co-design with professional regulators, cutting delays and reducing time to practice for engineers, geologists, and other licensed professions critical to national priorities.

Fast-track critical skills pipelines

Fast-tracking permanent residency for critical skills and transparently monitoring outcomes will secure talent pipelines, strengthen Australia's competitiveness, and accelerate progress toward clean energy and advanced industry goals.

- Create frictionless, accelerated permanent residency routes for skills essential to national strategic priorities, including those required for the critical minerals, the clean energy transition and net zero targets, such as STEM, advanced manufacturing, and specific trades.
- Monitor and report outcomes transparently by tracking settlement rates and retention in priority sectors. Clear reporting ensures accountability, demonstrates impact, and builds public confidence in migration as a driver of competitiveness and productivity.

Measure outcomes and maximise impact

Measuring outcomes such as earnings, skills use, the granting of licences and retention ensures skilled migrants achieve stronger career success and integration, while maximising their contribution to Australia's prosperity.

- Track post-arrival earnings, skills use and obtaining and retaining licences to ensure skilled migrants are not just arriving, but thriving in the Australian workforce
- Use outcome data to guide ongoing policy refinement so migrants experience faster credential recognition, stronger career progression and reduced underemployment.

The MCA appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry and stands ready to partner with all parties to deliver these outcomes.

Yours sincerely

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