

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government's 457 visa changes 'sound and considered' – resource industry

Australia's resource industry employer group, AMMA.

Statement by Scott Barklamb, Executive Director, Policy & Public Affairs

THE FEDERAL Government has today taken a sound and considered approach to improving the accessibility and operation of the 457 visa programme, including ensuring robust safeguards are in place to uphold the integrity and lawful use of temporary skilled migration in Australia.

In adopting most of the recommendations from an independent review of the 457 visa system in 2014, the newly announced changes will deliver a more streamlined process for responsible employers to access overseas skills where there is a genuine local shortage, and also strengthen efforts to identify and prosecute the minority who misuse the system.

Skilled migrants comprise a very small, yet very important part of the resource industry. During the recent period of increased resources investment and construction, 457 visa holders brought new global skills to Australia and assisted our industry in meeting unprecedented skills demands.

Despite shrill and overstated claims by some unions and the former ALP government, the 457 Visa Review Panel found no evidence to suggest unlawful or exploitative misuse of Australia's skilled migration programmes beyond a tiny minority.

AMMA's long-held position is that identifying and prosecuting this small minority is a far more responsible, mature and effective approach than shifting the goal posts for everyone. We welcome the government's intention to punish those found to be doing the wrong thing, while recognising the majority of employers who use temporary skilled migration programs responsibly.

Our position on specific recommendations adopted or rejected by the government includes:

Streamlined processing: AMMA welcomes the government providing reliable and proven responsible users of the 457 programme with more flexibility, less red tape and reduced costs.

English language testing: The government's minor changes to how English language competencies are tested provides a more realistic and practical test than the current system.

Market salary threshold: Lowering the market salary comparison threshold from \$250k to \$180k reflects AMMA's advice that this should be viewed as a safeguard for lower income jobs only.

Labour market testing: AMMA is disappointed that the government is not adopting the review panel's recommendation to remove the ALP's labour market testing provisions, which create additional paperwork with no practical benefit or justification.

Training contributions: AMMA has concerns with the government's adoption of the Review Panel's proposed new "per visa holder levy". This would replace the existing requirement for employers who use 457 visas to spend at least 1% or 2% of annual payroll on training Australians.

The current system works well in balancing 457 visa use with appropriate training for local workers. A "per visa" levy rather than an annual contribution risks penalising those AMMA members who invest heavily in training and apprenticeship programs as part of their regular business model and will no longer be able to offset existing training expenditure.

AMMA welcomes the government's willingness to consult further over this issue and will engage in future opportunities to explain our concerns with the training fund proposal in detail.

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