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## Australia's skilled migration framework should not be a political point-scorer

*Statement from Steve Knott, Chief Executive of Australian Resources and Energy Group AMMA, in response to the Australian Labor Party's immigration policy announced 23 April 2019.*

Australia's resources and energy employers are sick of both sides of government, when under pressure, turning to skilled temporary migration looking for a bounce in the polls or to buy votes. It's a short-sighted nationalist policy card often and disappointingly played by both sides of politics.

Our industry is a case study for how Australia's skilled migration programs should work, being responsive to changes in the economy and fluctuating labour demand.

Comprising about 1.5% of the workforce, skilled migrants are a very small, but nonetheless very important part of the resources and energy sector's skills needs. Our industry invests significantly in training and overwhelmingly looks to locals to fill positions.

The cyclical nature of the resources industry means that when the next wave of multi-billion dollar construction projects comes around, there will be a shortage of skilled labour for a short period of time. When that time comes, local workers have the economic protection being the exorbitant costs required to bring in overseas labour, and they have the policy protection through labour market testing and the requirement to pay market rates.

The claim that temporary visa holders are "cheap labour" has been debunked on numerous occasions. Business sponsors are required by law to pay market rates and must prove there are no locals available to fill the positions via quite onerous labour market testing.

[Research](#) by Edith Cowan University has shown that by the time employers' factor in recruitment and relocation costs, and deal with insurance and compliance, the cost of bringing someone in can be well over \$60,000.

We don't use skilled migration to cut costs, in fact it adds to cost. The industry would be bonkers if we didn't try to fill all positions with locals first.

Another important point that is often missed is that in our sector we are dealing with many multinational companies, where Australians are often seconded to overseas projects, enjoying the welcome mat and hospitality of other nations.

We need to be mature as a nation, to recognise we're in a global marketplace where the exchange of skills and talent is a two-way street.

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Brad Thompson, 0409 781 580