



Our Ref: 85665

18 September 2019

Mr Julian Leeson MP  
Member for Berowra NSW and Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Leeson,

**Re: Migration and settlement strategies in the Balonne Shire**

The Balonne Shire is located in Queensland, about 500km inland from the Queensland capital, Brisbane, and is nestled just above the New South Wales border. Our Shire serves as a bridge between the expanse of the great outback to its west, and the Great Dividing Range and capital city to its east. Across more than 31,000km<sup>2</sup>, 4334 residents call one of our seven communities home – St George, Thallon, Dirranbandi, Bollon, Nindigully, Mungindi, and Hebel. Traditionally, the Shire's economy has been built around agriculture, in particular, the production of cotton, grain, sheep and cattle. Growth has been shown in new areas such as tourism, and horticultural crops for example grapes, broccoli, onions, and garlic.

Outback Queensland represents some 60% of the state with only 2% of the population. For Balonne, the 2016 Census saw a 7% decline in population due to the drought and downturn in prominent economic sectors, and it is only getting worse each year.

We believe that population migration and immigration offers an obvious opportunity for regional and remote Australia to grow. Balonne Shire Council prospers to promote a welcoming regional community for skilled migrants from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Our objective is to foster skilled migrants of any age, culture, religion or race.

Our first initiative was to hire a Multicultural Development officer, this was the starting point to ascertain the requirements of our community and in turn we will be able to meet their needs, assisting us to become a welcoming community.

By means of close collaboration between our Multicultural Development Officer and our community we aim to ensure cultural diversity is recognised and accepted by the whole community and in doing so we will also formally acknowledge our traditional owners through partnerships with elders past, present and future. We will encourage social activities and events to help connect migrants with our regular residents. We will also provide an opportunity for

migrants to gain a better understanding of English, the national language of Australia which in turn will help migrants to find employment, become resilient in times of crisis and develop social networks outside of their own culture and to embrace other people's beliefs.

To make settlement a success in the Balonne Shire we believe it needs to be a locally managed sustainable growth. This means when looking at bringing the skilled migrants in, that their background and skills match our region for example the size of the community they are from, the jobs and skills they have match with the jobs and skills we require. It means that there needs to be the jobs available and potential jobs for the skilled migrants before they arrive in the Shire. To do this it requires having a relationship with the groups before moving out to find out their requirements and having a driver to match what we require.

Some of the restraints we have for being remote is limited services including language, housing, cultural awareness, financial relocation, connectivity, transport, medical, government agencies so for Skilled migrants to come into our shire they will have to have no visa constraints, opportunity for themselves and families, they will have to want to come here and make it home. For example if there is a group that is from a small area with a background in agriculture, they are family orientated, have a culture similar to those in St George, don't require a vast amount of medical, psychological and emotional well-being services and want a place to call home. The Balonne shire would be perfect for them.

Because of our location, limited services and infrastructure the support of stakeholders, government departments, agencies, state and federal government is important and necessary. We believe having a dedicated high level state and federal contact for our region is imperative for the success of migration of skilled migrants into the Balonne Shire.

Our whole strategy is community driven and if we want a successful migration strategy we first need the Balonne Community supporting and driving it, secondly skilled migrants that want to be here and have the Skills and background that matches ours and lastly Stakeholders to support the Balonne Shire. It needs to be driven locally, which in turn will make anyone coming in to the Balonne shire be made to feel welcome and a part of the community.

This initiative will allow Balonne Shire Council to establish a sustainable framework for Council and the Community to use into the future. The framework will also allow us to work with the community to change their mindset so that Balonne is a welcoming community into the future and for many generations to come.

Yours faithfully

Matthew Magin

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**