



27 April 2021

4/14/3

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into the efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions

On behalf of Tatiara District Council, I am pleased to make a submission in response to the *Inquiry into the efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions*.

Our district

The Tatiara is one of the largest local government areas in South Australia and part of the Limestone Coast in the State's south east. It is a thriving and innovative district, boasting a diverse agricultural base, including grains and stock, vineyards, small seeds, flowers, vegetables and olives, and strong businesses like Tatiara Truck & Trailers, the second largest truck repair and maintenance business in South Australia, Bordertown's JBS Australia, Keith Timber Group and Keith's Master Butchers Co-operative Ltd (MBL).

When Australia welcomed an unemployment rate of 6.5% in December 2020, South Australia 7%, the Tatiara recorded an unemployment rate of 2.3%, meaning that our businesses have to bring in significant labour from outside the region to fill vacancies.

A large number of employers are using migrant workers to address the district's labour shortages. For our largest employer, JBS Australia, migrants may make up 70% of its 470 strong workforce at any one time. Migrants are also employed in businesses who need seasonal workers like our vineyards, seed processors and vegetable growers.

The Tatiara is a friendly, safe and prosperous place to live. We are inclusive and welcoming and have offered refuge to many people from around the world. Today, 20% of the 6,800 people living in the Tatiara identify as migrants or refugees.

Tatiara District Council has taken a proactive, community development approach to migrant settlement and to improving support and opportunities for migrants in the Tatiara.

In 2018, Council, in partnership with the local Migrant Resource Centre and major employer JBS, first committed to a Migrant Community



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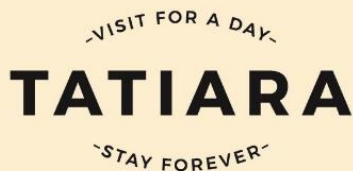
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Action Plan, which is updated annually to reflect the achievement of our past goals and set the direction for the year ahead.

We are a member of Welcoming Cities, have created and fund a community development migration specific role, and have facilitated the establishment of the Tatiara Multicultural Group, a newly formed incorporated association with a diverse membership of over seventy people from many different cultural groups.

We are well positioned to comment in response to this inquiry's terms of reference through our extensive consultation, engagement and service delivery to the new arrivals in our community.

I would like to highlight two matters of particular concern to us:

Waiting times for visa processing

The extensive time taken for the processing and integrity checking of visa applications has a tremendous negative impact on the mental health of those waiting to be reunited with their families, including severe depression and anxiety.

With 2020 finding many of us in extended lockdowns due to the pandemic, we have ourselves experienced the anxiety of being isolated from our family, unable to help in times of need.

But while we have been able to reconnect, for at least a third of our new residents, refugees who have escaped traumatic experiences in their former home country, leaving their wives and children behind in a hostile and unsafe environment, this has been the terrifying reality for many years.

The stress, worry and fear the men experience about their far away families impacts their ability to concentrate and retain information, and in turn decreases their capacity to engage in English language classes. They feel intense guilt, preventing them from becoming involved in community activities while their families remain in war torn countries.

This does not only impact capacity building and reduces integration opportunities, it also has a long-term effect on our new residents' ability to contribute to their full capacity to our community and economy.

Reuniting families will facilitate long-term settlement. It will bring comfort and relief, and provide opportunities for regional areas such as ours to address workforce shortage issues, develop integration and capacity building opportunities and build vibrancy and engagement in our towns.

Budgetary and governmental impacts

Successful settlement relies on strong, locally led initiatives. We might be able to attract migrants to the regions with a variety of programs but if we do not effectively support their settlement in our communities we will be unable to retain our new residents in the medium to long term.

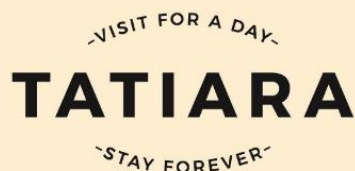
In the Tatiara, settlement support provided by Council and the Migrant Resource Centre with very limited funding and a huge amount of goodwill and volunteer contributions includes:



- Case management for people not fitting the criteria for official settlement programs (TPV, SHEV, post five-year settlement, etc.)
- Formal as well as volunteer run English classes
- Education sessions, including school information sessions for new parents, RAA road safety quiz, waste management, Australian laws and regulations
- Swim and Survive program for migrants
- Harmony Day events
- Culture specific celebrations – Naruz, Eid, welcome parties etc.
- Promoting integration through sporting clubs and various community events
- Homemade dinner series - harnessing the universal language of food to build acceptance and understanding
- Assisting staff induction at major employer
- Supporting service providers - medical clinic, schools, post office etc. care for the migrant community

While our local activities have been very successful, they cannot be resourced by a small rural community on its own in the long term. It is essential that federal and state governments invest in regional communities to support settlement and capacity building work provided by organisations like the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, local government, community groups and businesses.

Migrants make an invaluable contribution to our community, greatly enriching our towns economically, socially and culturally, and I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry.



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Yours faithfully,

Anne Champness
Chief Executive Officer