



GREATER
SHEPPARTON

18 September 2019

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By Email Only: migration@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION – ENQUIRY INTO MIGRANT SETTLEMENT STRATEGIES AND MIGRATION SETTINGS

Greater Shepparton City Council writes this submission into the 'Inquiry into the Breadth of Migrant Settlement Strategies and Migration Settings in Regional Australia'.

Greater Shepparton is regarded as the Food Bowl of Victoria and contributes 25% towards Victoria's total agricultural output. Our area is also regularly referred to as the growing transport hub with 25% of Victoria's truck registrations occurring within our region. The local dairy industry also plays a significant role contributing towards 25% of Australia's milk supply. The region is home to large scale business and manufacturing such as SPC, Pental, Rubicon, Unilever, Tatura Milk Industries, Freedom Foods, Provincial Foods, Visy, Jef Tomson, Campbell's Soup and many more. Our region is recognised as one of the most multicultural regional centres within Australia, with over 15% of the population identifying as born outside of the country. The Greater Shepparton municipality also has one of the largest Aboriginal populations within Victoria outside of metropolitan Melbourne.

Greater Shepparton City Council has identified, through business consultation, a labour shortage in unskilled and skilled workers in our region, in particular within the agriculture industry. These positions in agriculture, typically filled by migrants or temporary visa holders, are seeing a high turnover of employees due to penalty rate constraints placed on employers, visa constraints on migrants and limitations on 'hours worked' requirements by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

As a result of these findings Greater Shepparton City Council, in conjunction with Moira Shire and Campaspe Shire, are currently undergoing a process that may lead to an application for a Designated Area Migrant Agreement (DAMA) to cater for the various skill gaps within the respective regions. These skilled and unskilled labour shortages are constraining business and industry development across the region, stifling economic prosperity and it is imperative this issue be addressed in the immediate term. A DAMA would allow for migrants to be full time employed in our region with the option to apply permanent residency after 3 years full time employment. The option of permanent residency after 3 years will provide the migrant and their family with certainty and an opportunity to become involved in the community, settle into the region, build relationships and develop support networks which would entice them to remain in the municipality.

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Regional Skilled Migration is an integral part of Greater Shepparton's labour market however there are limited support services for skilled migrants and often they experience cultural shock in adapting to Australia's 'way of life'. Scenarios such as working with women, social culture of Australia's workplaces and perceived employment racism are common amongst skilled migrants during their settlement into a regional area and support services such as skilled cultural counsellors, mentors and collaborative cultural spaces for skilled migrants are limited.

A well developed and transport connected regional centre would allow Greater Shepparton to accommodate decentralisation opportunities reducing the existing burden on metropolitan Melbourne and further assisting in migrant settlement in our region by providing adequate transport options. Greater Shepparton urgently requires infrastructure investment from both the Victorian and Federal Government to support and build the municipality's transport network to provide these regular services to migrants allowing them better access to employment opportunities, training, accommodation and personal services. Despite recent substantial investment in passenger rail, the Victorian Government's current financial commitment does not address all infrastructure requirements necessary for full VLOCITY operation by 2020 or provide a substantive increase in services nor reducing travel times.

Whilst funding for Stage 1 of the Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment was provided in the 16/17 Victorian Budget, funding for Stage 2 is urgently required to support our region's main hospital which is not in a position where it can adequately service its catchment of over 220,000 people, of which 15% are migrants, in turn limiting the hospital's ability to attract and retain staff including skilled migrant workers.

Further investment from the Victorian and Federal Government in education outcomes and education infrastructure is required to provide adequate training opportunities to migrants who settle in our region. Currently students wishing to study specific courses relevant to careers in our region, for example Horticulture and Agriculture courses, must attend units in Bendigo and Melbourne as the units are unavailable in Greater Shepparton campuses. When a migrant family settles in our region with a young family, typically we are seeing secondary migration through the family unit relocating to metropolitan areas when the children reach high school age in order to have access to a broader range of universities and educational courses.

The above mentioned infrastructure projects are just some examples of infrastructure upgrades that have huge potential for our municipality to attract and retain migrants, assisting in their settlement in our region.

GOTAFE currently run the Federal Government's English Language Program which has been found to be impractical for migrants with a low success rate, in particular for younger migrants aged between 18 and 30 years, with feedback being the course is slow and students are finding it hard to see pathways to employment and further education.

Greater Shepparton has a proud and appreciative culture around its cultural diversity, stemming from WWI and further developed over many years that exhibits a welcoming, all inclusive, supportive and open community of sporting groups, education services, cultural groups, businesses and services for migrants. The community and all the groups contained within are integral to the facilitation of migrant settlement in our region. The community of Greater Shepparton work collaboratively to provide a range of settlement

services and support networks to migrants in our region. The limited number of support agencies in our region has been found to have an impact on the migrant's initial transition period into settling in our region as there is minimal competition between agencies to provide a high standard of service to migrants. Greater Shepparton City Council's Multicultural Strategy 2019-2022 adopted in March 2019 is based on valuing communities, recognising their contributions to our society and celebrating our cultural diversity and Council will continue to work toward strategies and initiatives that provide greater settlement opportunities for migrants encouraging them to remain in our region and prosper.

Whilst Greater Shepparton has a large migrant population and a culturally accepting, inclusive and supportive community, greater support is required from the Victorian and Federal Government to further assist in the retention and attraction of migrants (both humanitarian and migrant workers) to our region. As outlined in this submission:

- Infrastructure support for health services, education services and adequate transport services is imperative to quality settlement of migrants and retention of migrants in regional areas.
- Improved settlement services for both migrant workers and humanitarian migrants including increased agency competition to improve service quality, increased services available to assist skilled migrants in adapting to Australia's culture.
- Adequate and improved education and learning services accompanied by a combined effort from Government, business and industry to implement practical solutions such as combined employment and English Learning Program opportunities with incentives for employers to provide these opportunities, as has been done in other regional areas, providing an active learning space whilst migrants can earn an income to support their families through settlement.
- Revised migrant employment policies, protocols and realistic penalty rates allowing employers equitable and viable labour solutions in order to provide migrants full time and regular employment opportunities in regional areas of Australia.

All these elements will allow regional areas all over Australia, including Greater Shepparton to better facilitate and support regional migrants and encourage migrants to continue to live regionally reducing the burden on metropolitan areas.

Greater Shepparton City Council is grateful for this opportunity to provide a submission in relation to 'Inquiry into the Breadth of Migrant Settlement Strategies and Migration Settings in Regional Australia'. Should you wish to discuss any of the above in greater detail, please do not hesitate to make contact with Director Sustainable Development, Geraldine Christou

Yours sincerely

Peter Harriott
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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