



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

**Reference: State-specific migration mechanisms.**

FRIDAY, 28 JANUARY 2000

MOUNT GAMBIER

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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**JOINT COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION**

**Friday, 28 January 2000**

**Members:** Mrs Gallus (Chair), Senators Bartlett, Eggleston, McKiernan and Tierney and Mr Adams, Mr Baird, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May and Mr Ripoll

**Senators and members in attendance:** Senators Bartlett and McKiernan and Mr Adams, Mrs Gallus, Mrs May and Mr Ripoll

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To review and report on the suite of State-specific Migration Mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of State and Territory governments for skilled and business migrants with particular reference to:

- The adequacy of consultations with States/Territories on the mechanisms that have been developed;
- The level to which State and Territory Governments have utilised these mechanisms;
- Steps that might be taken to increase take-up; and
- Other mechanisms that might be developed

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**Committee met at 9.03 am**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this first public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's review of state-specific migration mechanisms. These mechanisms relate to the issue of bringing overseas migrants to regional Australia, so it is appropriate that the committee's first hearing is held in a regional centre here in Mount Gambier.

The review of state-specific migration mechanisms was referred to the committee in June 1999 by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The purpose of the review is to examine and report on the range of state-specific migration mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of state and territory governments for skilled and business migrants. The terms of reference focus on the adequacy of consultation with states and territories on the mechanisms that have been developed, the level to which state and territory governments have utilised these mechanisms, steps that might be taken to increase the take-up, and other mechanisms that might be developed. At the conclusion of the review, the committee will table its findings, conclusions and recommendations in the parliament in a report which will be publicly available.

The committee has received 24 submissions from state and territory governments, migration agents and people with an interest in these issues. The committee normally authorises submissions for publication and they are placed on the committee's web site. The committee has received a number of submissions specifically for this hearing. Is it the wish of the committee that the submissions tabled by the Greater Green Triangle Region Association, Mr W. Barber, Mr L. Koenders, Mr W. Joyce, Mr B. Ohlmeyer and Mr C. Chai be accepted as evidence to the inquiry and authorised for publication? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The committee would like to thank Mr Michael Whitehead of the Greater Green Triangle Region Association for his assistance in facilitating the committee's hearing here at Mount Gambier. The committee is pleased to have an opportunity to hear from those with a direct involvement in regional migration issues. If you would like further details about the review, please feel free to ask any of the committee staff here at the hearing. The committee will take evidence from witnesses as listed on the program; however, if any member of the audience wishes to comment on any aspect of the issues raised, please let Gillian Gould know, and we will try to make time available for you. I now welcome witnesses from the Greater Green Triangle Region Association.

[9.05 a.m.]

**LAWSON, Ms Stacey Anne, Admin/Project Officer, Greater Green Triangle Region Association**

**WHITEHEAD, Mr Michael, Executive Officer, Greater Green Triangle Region Association**

**WILSON, Ms Suzie, Consultant, Greater Green Triangle Region Association**

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require witnesses to give evidence under oath, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the parliament. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to the submission you have already given us?

**Mr Whitehead**—No.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers that evidence be given in public, but if you wish to give confidential evidence to the committee you may request to do so. Before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes. I will spend a couple of minutes giving you a brief outline of the Greater Green Triangle Region and the main points of our submission. The Greater Green Triangle Region has been in existence for around 25 years as a formal body, and as a regional development organisation it was one of the first, in around 1994. At the completion of the REDO funding in 1997-98, the organisation voted to continue because the local government member saw it as such an essential organisation for the region's development.

Basically, it is made up of 18 to 20 municipalities, covers around 80,000 square kilometres and has a population of around 250,000 people. It provides a network for local government, industry and communities to come together to work on projects of a regional basis rather than those that can be tackled on a smaller basis. Its major focuses, apart from immigration, have concerned telecommunications, export promotion, promotion of links with China, regional health and regional facilitation of projects. The funding for the Green Triangle comes almost exclusively from its local government members, as well as from various projects that the REDO takes on.

As far as the state sponsored migration schemes are concerned, the Greater Green Triangle Association is of the view that this program is essential and has provided benefits so far, even in small numbers, for the region. We see it as important, not just for the economic benefits for the region but also for the continued growth of cultural diversity in country regions such as this. We welcome this inquiry to the region. Over the past few years we have seen a number of areas that have needed examination, and we welcome the chance to put those forward today.

We look forward to discussing the three main situations that need examining. They are the role of certifying bodies in the region, particularly in Victoria and the lack of those for many regions in Victoria; secondly, resources for the program in continuing its promotion and also in the administration of the program by REDO – such as the Green Triangle; and, thirdly, ironing out some of the bureaucratic unpredictability of the program at times to streamline the program more for businesses and for regions that are taking part. Therefore we feel that the numbers so far, while small in our area, are satisfactory; that the benefits to industry and communities are being felt; and we see that it is important for the program to continue and to grow.

**CHAIR**—Mr Whitehead, you made some very interesting comments which I would like to take up. The first one was the role of the certifying bodies, especially in Victoria. Could you please expand on that a little?

**Mr Whitehead**—Basically, as far the bodies which exist to provide approval and to provide the mechanisms between industry and the federal government for the program at the moment, as you would know, vary from state to state – whether they be state development departments. In Victoria it appears that a situation has arisen – and a number of industries have contacted us about this – where the only certifying body left in Victoria is the Greater Green Triangle. It is the last regional organisation that continues to provide this. The western Murray region may be providing it, but it is really downsizing its operations in terms of immigration.

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Therefore we have a number of industries from Gippsland, northern Victoria and central Victoria approaching us for assistance which officially we cannot provide because they do not come into our region.

**Ms Lawson**—That has happened quite a lot. In the last three months I have had about four people from outside our region contact me, and therefore we could not help them.

**CHAIR**—And they are from Victoria?

**Ms Lawson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I take it that you can certify, but that for South Australia the economic development commission in Adelaide can also do it?

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes, the state department is also the official certifying body there.

**CHAIR**—I am stunned by that piece of information; that we have actually set up a system for certifying, that it has fallen apart and that people from Gippsland and northern Victoria are coming to you for certification.

**Mr Whitehead**—It is something that we can perhaps tackle under the exceptional circumstances as to whether a number of these applicants fall into a number of categories – a point I am sure we will touch on later – and whether they have to be applied for in not fitting within the guidelines. So we can approach it that way. However, as far as streamlining the whole program and making it easier is concerned, this is certainly a point that needs to be looked at for those industries outside our region.

**CHAIR**—That was the first point I wanted to pick up on. It is extraordinary. The next point was the bureaucratic unpredictability that you talked about.

**Mr Whitehead**—Basically – and Suzie and Stacey may wish to comment on this – we have had a number of situations arise over time where the approval mechanisms coming back from the department have varied markedly in length. Contact and information from the department has been scant and occasionally very difficult to receive as well. This has often put our industries seeking these employees in a difficult situation. We feel that perhaps performance indicators, or some time lines, need to be set down so the reporting mechanisms can be filled in a particular time so that the local industries can know at what stage they should expect information and an answer from the department.

**CHAIR**—Would you take us then just quickly from the beginning to the end – how the process starts and then how you would go through it and where you see that variation occurring?

**Ms Wilson**—Basically the applicant comes in, we check it all out and make sure that the criteria are filled –

**CHAIR**—Here we are talking about a businessman who wants to bring somebody in?

**Ms Wilson**—That is right, yes. He will contact us. We will make sure that he has met all the criteria. Once it is sent to the immigration department –

**CHAIR**—I am sorry to interrupt. So you are checking that he has actually advertised that position over a certain time and there is nobody filling that position?

**Ms Wilson**—That is right, yes. Basically it is then sent to the immigration department. We are not quite sure exactly how long it should take for them to notify us whether this has been approved or not approved and whether if there are any problems we can help. We do not want to see any of the documentation that supports it. We just want you to say, ‘Yes, that has all been filled.’ I have rung a couple of times and got, ‘Has this position been advertised because I have been waiting to hear and nothing has come back?’ If they had phoned and let us know there was a problem, that could have been fixed straightaway. We do not know if things have been approved and we are chasing that up.

**CHAIR**—You have already approved at your level?

**Ms Wilson**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—You have given it the big green tick and said, ‘Yes, we have approved it,’ and you have sent it on to Immigration and they are dragging their feet. You have done the documentation and you have said it is okay,

so what opportunity have they got at this stage to drag their feet? They should be really just going through your thing and saying, 'Yes, yes, yes, they have done all the right stuff.'

**Ms Wilson**—That is what we would hope would happen, but sometimes it is not happening. That is where we are finding it a bit of a problem. These people are waiting to hear whether their application has been approved.

**CHAIR**—And Immigration are not telling you why some are longer or shorter than others?

**Ms Wilson**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—What is the length of time between a really good one and a really bad one?

**Ms Wilson**—Some of them take a week, which is fantastic. I was chasing one for around six weeks at one stage, just basically phoning all the time and having to leave a message. Nobody would get back to me. I would keep phoning and still leaving messages.

**CHAIR**—Was that six-week one eventually approved?

**Ms Wilson**—That is right, it was approved.

**CHAIR**—But nobody could tell you why one took one week and one took six weeks?

**Ms Wilson**—No, or whether it had been approved and we had not been notified. They normally send a fax through after a week, but we heard nothing.

**CHAIR**—Would one of my colleagues like to take up the questioning?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Thank you very much for your submission. It certainly helped my understanding of how the different systems work. In preparing the submission did you take a conscious decision to sit on the fence as to making a judgment on whether the schemes were working to the advantage of regional Australia or not working to the advantage of regional Australia?

**Mr Whitehead**—No. We took a conscious decision to put our view that the scheme was working to their advantage so far and that, while the intake so far was small, with continuing promotion of it and as it gradually sank into the psyche of the regional communities and regional industries, we could see the uptake increasing. So far the effect has been beneficial.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—What numbers are we talking about to reach your measurement for success of the scheme?

**Mr Whitehead**—It would be very difficult to put a number on it where you could say it has fallen or it has succeeded on this particular number. I suppose if one could see 50 to 100 people, hypothetically, each year coming into the region – a region, as I said, of 250,000-odd – you would see it as being successful. It may seem like a small number, but with so many of the smaller communities here having a skilled industry of some kind – but it is still a small community – one extra employee affecting a business and therefore the community directly through that business and indirectly through boosting the regional economy is a lot of people boosting small economies.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I accept all of that. I think somewhere along the line there has to be some yardstick to measure either success or failure, just to check how it is going. In terms of the people who are successes then, are you able to tell the committee how many people have come in under the scheme and have remained on and completed their commitment, if you like, to regional Australia and to Australia as a whole?

**Mr Whitehead**—To the best of my knowledge, each of the people who has come into this region has remained there and shows no sign of leaving. We have had no sign of employer dissatisfaction or any sign that things may be changing. The point may be raised that the scheme has the danger that people may come into the program temporarily and then leave as soon as their time is up to get back to the city, or they may remain in the area and add to the unemployment problem. In this region we have not seen that at all.

**Ms Lawson**—Can I just add also that generally with the people that have come into the area the employers in the region have known of this person, this migrant, beforehand. They have known this migrant and come to us and said, 'We know this person. We would really love to have him working for us.' They are already in



contact with this person and have told him about the region. Most likely the person already knows a lot of information about the region, and that adds to the reason why such migrants are staying.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—In the main, that person would already be in Australia?

**Ms Lawson**—No. Such people may still be overseas. It is just that they know of them. They may have worked with them previously. It may be contract work or something like that. Somehow they have linked with this person and they are more likely to know about the region and the employer and also they are more likely to stay.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Under 5 in your submission you posed a question at the bottom of the page and then over the page about the extension of the SSMM designated areas to include all of Australia except Perth and the Brisbane-Sydney coastal strip. You further ask a question over the page – and I do not believe you have answered the question you have asked for yourself – whether it is eroding the value of the scheme. Why should a city the size of Melbourne with over three million people be able to compete on an equal basis with a region such as yours, which is quite a large geographical region from the appendix that you sent? Is it, as you call it, undermining the scheme?

**Mr Whitehead**—We would say not so much undermining the scheme as, perhaps, dissipating its effectiveness. In our response there we also say that perhaps the committee needs to really look at re-evaluating the role of cities in that program. Also, even if one takes the cities out of that program and keeps regional areas such as Geelong and Ballarat, a ranking system of need or of points where people will go from a far more populated centre to the lesser populated ones could be provided. In terms of the capital cities, we are quite clear on the fact we really said they have no role in this program.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I have mentioned Melbourne in my question, but the matter of Adelaide also must be addressed as we are in the state of South Australia. When you think of regional areas there is Hobart, which is a capital city but also one that would probably fit more pleasantly into a definition of regional centre than would Melbourne, for example.

**Mr Whitehead**—Definitely. But once again we go back to the fact that, while there will be different areas of need with different employment potential in them, that is where we need to look at keeping the smaller capitals such as Adelaide or Hobart in a particular program. The question is: is this the program for them or should a separate one be set up?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Thanks very much.

**CHAIR**—Could you just take that a bit further and tell me what impact it has on you down here in the Greater Green Triangle if Adelaide is also included in it? What is the negative impact on you on having Adelaide in this program as well?

**Mr Whitehead**—The negative impact would be that for particular skilled migrants in any part of the world looking to see what criteria they match that would gain them eligibility under the Regional Migration Scheme and then finding that equal positions are available in Adelaide and in Bordertown, for example, they will go to Adelaide.

**CHAIR**—It depends which part of the scheme you are accessing, doesn't it? If it is the states bringing out people with a general skill base, then that creates a problem for you if Adelaide is in it. But in the employee nomination schemes that obviously has no effect at all because your employers are identifying specific people which they bring specifically into the region.

**Mr Whitehead**—That is right. Under that scheme, it remains applicable to the right town.

**CHAIR**—Could you see it being broken up into different areas? Where you have the state sponsoring people with skills perhaps that could be concentrated on just the regional areas, or a separate program for the regional areas and the city, whereas obviously with employee nomination there is no effect if you include everybody under the same scheme.

**Mr Whitehead**—There is a range of potential models that the program could have after it was restructured. Certainly, to break up the state sponsored ones into those particular areas does need examination, particularly

in light of some of the different states' regional development programs too. Because they differ so much from state to state, markedly, even between Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, that would need some re-examination.

**CHAIR**—I was interested when you said that you would grade the areas, and I thought, 'How would you grade the areas?' From what you are saying, I suspect you would say, 'All right, if we look perhaps at one of the ones we have not looked at, where a relative is bringing somebody in and they require slightly fewer points, would it then require, for instance, in Adelaide slightly fewer points than nationally, and in this, the Greater Green Triangle, even fewer points, and maybe Bordertown even fewer?' Is that the sort of thing you are looking at?

**Mr Whitehead**—That is certainly potential; and then if you bring into the equation issues such as population, such as employment data in that region at the time, you could even bring in factors such as: is there a community of people speaking that language in that particular area? That is also going to have an effect.

**CHAIR**—Do you think, then, you are getting into a position where you are likely to alter the program to the effect that you are bringing in people who cannot find employment and then are really just adding to negative statistics in the area?

**Mr Whitehead**—As we said, in terms of the program thus far, prior to any potential changes, that has not been the case. Any potential model would obviously be put together so it would try and rule that out of the equation.

**CHAIR**—If you are looking at grading, at some stage, if people have the widest opportunity to have lower standards for that immigration, you have got a problem that you could be getting to such a low standard that those people are actually not going to be employed when they get into the area.

**Mr Whitehead**—Definitely, if you put the people with the least number of points into the areas with the least industry, it certainly would be a problem.

**Mrs MAY**—In your submission you talk about the impediments to the scheme, particularly in relation to relatives and families having some bearing on where people come to. You suggest that one possibility in the review is that we look at how to encourage families as a whole, and that way keeping them and they make a bigger contribution to the community. Could you expand on what you would like us to look at there and how we could possibly include that with the scheme?

**Mr Whitehead**—There are two parts to your question, both families and communities. We would see them as equally important. On the community side of things – and it has been examined by a number of towns and shires in this region – the possibility of bringing in a particular group of skilled migrants from whatever country it may be, a non-English-speaking or English-speaking country, would make it more likely to be able to set up, say, an intensive horticultural base in a particular area. That will not happen with one horticulturist, but it will happen with a community. There has been some work done on that.

In the area of families, the reason we highlighted that was because for many of these towns where the size of particularly the non-English-speaking population is so small – two per cent, I think, in this area and falling – it is going to be very difficult to attract some of those skilled people out here for areas where we will find work. So it is really giving them a like community to make the community they are coming to more attractive.

**Mrs MAY**—Thank you.

**Mr ADAMS**—I just want to clarify that you feel the regional bodies are quite appropriate to do the certification.

**Ms Lawson**—Yes, I would say that we are. We are touch with a lot of the employers and industries within the region; we are aware of what is going on. It has to be at a reasonably local level. But, having said that, I do not think you want to have too small a level because then you have got too many boundaries, and there are problems if it crosses boundaries. At the same time you do not want it to be at too high a level. It has got to be close enough to the ground roots so that you can actually certify someone; you can look at what they present to you so that you can say, 'Okay, these people have actually advertised and, yes, it is going to be beneficial for

the community and the region.' If you take that at too high a level, if you went to perhaps state level, and definitely at federal level, that is too far from the ground. I think regional level is definitely a very good level to have it at.

**Mr ADAMS**—I just want to tease out having a point system based on a regional structure. For regional development in Australia we have got a lot of regions – states do it differently – and it is always impossible to get boundaries, though we do create them for various reasons and because we need them for logistical reasons. Do you see any difficulties in having a point system for your area or other areas in South Australia, or from any other experience that you have had with other states? Could you use that point system of family migration or, as you said, possibly looking at groups of migrants, because migrants tend to go where there is family or there is already a community and a culture?

**Mr Whitehead**—When you say a 'point system', do you mean the existing point system?

**Mr ADAMS**—Yes, or a new point system of a region gaining points, giving a migrant more points if they go to that region.

**Mr Whitehead**—We would see no difficulty in that at all. Perhaps the only hurdle we would come across is in administering the scheme; the resources that exist at the moment to administer it are not there. But as far as going through those processes is concerned, if it is properly administered, no, it would not be a problem at all. Could I also add to the point you made before on whether the REDOs are the right people to be running this at the moment. If you look at the South Australian example – and it has been run through state development in South Australia – you have a centralised body in Adelaide. I think one of the options in Victoria is that it has been proposed that Business Victoria run the program. Business Victoria's nearest regional office to us is 4½ hours away in Geelong. One of the beauties of this program so far is that, because the local bodies have on-the-ground knowledge, we know already all the local industries and where the needs are and the individuals involved. It is not just a generic program; it can be targeted to particular individuals.

**Mr ADAMS**—My next question was about resources. Maybe the states need to have a role in resourcing some of that work. Do you think that local governments have a role to play, if migrants do come into their region, in assisting people with cultural difficulties or helping people find, where there are opportunities for them to find, where religious bases are and that sort of thing?

**Mr Whitehead**—It certainly would be a new role for a lot of the country local government community offices and cultural offices as well. It is something they have not looked at so far. As far as states playing a role goes, it does present some difficulties because a lot of the regional organisations are cross-border, which always presents a problem with formula as far as resources go. But the local government's role certainly is one that needs to be looked at. Every local government now has an economic development unit and, because they recognise, particularly in this region, that immigration plays a role in their economic development, it would certainly fit in there.

**Senator BARTLETT**—Could you just outline that a bit more? You said before that it would be about 50 to 100 per year, broadly speaking, in the whole region. Would you see problems if you increase it beyond that level?

**Mr Whitehead**—No, we do not really see any problems. Obviously there are going to be issues of – in relation to Mr Adams's previous question – whether the facilities are there to help some of the migrants – if necessary, families adapting to the region and some of the services that may be necessary. But, by and large, so far none of that has been necessary. Based on the calibre of the people we have had in so far – in relation to the skills level – none of that has been necessary. No, we would see no major problem. One of the points that we made in our submission was that it must be kept in mind that obviously there will be certain attitudes in country and city areas towards immigration. Whatever these may be, one must keep them in mind as the program goes along. In looking at small towns across the place that have Chinese doctors, Malaysian scientists and Argentinean skilled workers of different kinds, we have really so far seen no sign of any problem at all.

**Senator BARTLETT**—Have you seen any evidence, or perceptions even, that these skilled people are taking jobs from others locally who have the same skills but cannot get jobs?

**Mr Whitehead**—I have come across that perception in some towns, but no more so than about people moving from Melbourne or Adelaide and taking over the town. It is going to be an underlying theme the whole time in a very small way. In no way have I seen it right across this region in a worrying way at all. By and large, as the Green Triangle has made it clear through our extensive marketing of the whole program, the position must be advertised and go through all those processes. Every major employer in this region knows that by and large you have intense trouble getting employees to come from the capital cities.

**Senator BARTLETT**—What are the skill areas that people are filling to date?

**Ms Wilson**—A chef at the moment is almost impossible to find, so that was something. We have also got some people who are working in a quarry down in Port Fairy. If people say, 'We need our people employed before you bring somebody else in,' it does not take much to point out that, for instance with the chef, they have somebody in there now that actually trains more people, so it is basically making jobs for another couple of locals by having somebody else in. A tae kwon do teacher was another one that went to Warrnambool. They had a lot of trouble getting somebody there. They had trouble getting physiotherapists.

**Ms Lawson**—Veterinary surgeons and doctors. There was also a need for a salesperson that specialised in particular products. A broad range of skilled occupations is involved.

**Senator BARTLETT**—You mention in your submission – and I think in your opening remarks as well – the benefits of increased diversity. Firstly, inasmuch as you can quantify, what range of culture diversity is there in your region at the moment? Could you expand a bit more on what some of the benefits of increasing that would be to the region?

**Mr Whitehead**—I think we can officially say that this region is the least culturally diverse in Australia. By official statistics, we have two per cent of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and the proportion is falling over the past few years. There is a range of enormous benefits. One of the things we as the Green Triangle do is promote links with China. We have a sister region in China. We take industry groups, local government and school groups in and out the whole time in both directions. You are really promoting an understanding and a worldliness there. Importantly, local industries more and more realise they have to work in the global marketplace – the nasty 'g' word 'globalisation' comes up again – but if they are going to have that idea of dealing with different cultures, with different ways of doing business and with different people they are going to need a different way of looking at things.

**Mr RIPOLL**—I know you have already touched on this one, but one of your recommendations is that you must be aware of the sensitivities of regional communities to immigrants coming in. But what about the other way round? Does the attitude of the small towns affect the decision of skilled migrants going into certain areas?

**Mr Whitehead**—Your question is: does it affect people coming in? From the work that the Green Triangle does in promoting this region in Asia, we know that some political debate over the past few years has had a negative effect on people coming into this region. That is for certain. However, one other thing that we really feel is important is that, in marketing this scheme overseas, to give a migrant in Malaysia or Mauritius, wherever they may be, an idea of some of the regions they are coming to in Australia, there needs to be information on regions going out. They need to have an idea of the size of the towns, the demographics of these communities and the breakdown of these towns.

We have an unfortunate example in Hamilton of a Chinese couple who arrived on the information that Hamilton was a town of a million people. It has about 9,500 people. I think they are the only Chinese speakers in town and they do not speak English. You need that information going out as well to make the flow come in. As for any negative reaction, it has happened, but it has been through areas outside our doing.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Where you say the consultative process must be aware of the sensitivities, what are they?

**Mr Whitehead**—Basically, I suppose, it is keeping in mind any negative reaction that you may get in country towns – in cities as well but in the area we are looking at, country towns – to migration to the towns. When this inquiry has finished and we are looking at future promotion of the scheme, I am sure one thing that

would be kept in mind is how to make sure that it is not seen as imposing workers from outside and taking jobs away from locals.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Do you find it is more prominent, say, in the smaller towns? Are you finding the effect is larger the smaller the town?

**Mr Whitehead**—I would say it is very small everywhere. Now and then somebody local will say, ‘This is what is happening. Look what jobs have been taken away.’ It is so small and it is so predictable from some of those points that it is of no concern.

**Mr RIPOLL**—So it is not really a major issue.

**Mr Whitehead**—No.

**Mr RIPOLL**—And it is easily managed and it is just a matter of correct information.

**Mr Whitehead**—If it had come up as an issue or as a concern we would have tackled it long ago, but we have not seen it as a problem.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Okay, that is fine.

**CHAIR**—There are a couple of Chinese in Hamilton who do not speak English. Where did they get in and under what program?

**Mr Whitehead**—They did not come in under this program.

**CHAIR**—I am relieved.

**Mr Whitehead**—How did they get in? That is a very good question. My Chinese is not good enough to ask them how that happened and I must find out, but it was not under this.

**CHAIR**—I am curious. We have talked a lot about the employee nomination, because the whole scheme has all the different aspects. You have given us a lovely example of the employee one and the problems you have with that. I have one more question before I move on to the next one. How do your employers who need someone from overseas get to know about them? I can understand it if they have worked for them, but there must be a lot of employers in the Greater Green Triangle who need a specific skill but do not have a clue of anybody in the greater wide world who could fill that position.

**Ms Lawson**—It is amazing that basically everybody who has come to us has had somebody in mind, whether it is through where they are bringing parts from or something. I am not really quite sure where they find them, but I do know with the skill matching pool that the people who are in there do not match up with the appropriate positions.

**CHAIR**—That is what I am getting to next. That is the employer one which seems to be working reasonably well except for bureaucratic delays.

**Ms Lawson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Another one is where people are let into the region because you are the region where they have the skills that your region is supposed to need. Are you having a problem with that?

**Ms Lawson**—I have somebody at the moment who is inquiring about the scheme. They are looking for a Land Rover mechanic. They have advertised Australia-wide and cannot get anybody, but basically the people on skill matching sheets do not match up to that either. I have a bit of trouble there.

**CHAIR**—Where is that falling down? It is the states’ responsibility to identify what skills are required in the region. Is the state not doing its job or is this just an odd one-off that there is not that many four-wheel drive Land Rover mechanics around?

**Ms Lawson**—That could be the case as well. I have not had to deal with it a lot because most people that come to us have somebody in mind.

**CHAIR**—They are specific.

**Ms Lawson**—That is right. It is just this one in particular. Basically, they will now go to their Sydney office and ask if they know of somebody overseas who wants to come over. I guess that is how they are finding people.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any evidence of anybody trying to get a job in the region who are able to come in because they have skills that are supposed to be required and are unable to get work?

**Ms Lawson**—No.

**Mr Whitehead**—There have been some in other instances through the GGT, yes, and those particular people have had their information forwarded to local government economic development units across the region, too. As far as I know, and it is a small number so far, none of those people have so far received employment, but it may be that they are particularly in areas that are saturated at the moment.

**CHAIR**—That might be a part of the scheme that we really need to look at more carefully.

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—The other part is where you can bring a family member in but they require slightly fewer points than they would if they were coming to Sydney, for instance. Do you have any instances of that down here, or is that because you do not have a very large ethnic population?

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes, that could have a lot to do with it.

**CHAIR**—So that problem with that scheme is a chicken and an egg thing because you do not have the families to bring them into the regions.

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes. It is not so much a problem but, until the numbers grow, that second part does not kick in because there will not be those communities.

**Ms Lawson**—This is not quite what you were saying but, through being with the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, I have heard of people that would have come in under the scheme if their family was allowed to come with them. For some reason they have had family members who did not make it under the scheme, such as a father and daughter relationship and the daughter is not allowed to come and then the father has turned around and said he is no longer coming either. The father was one who was going to take a position and add to the community and his daughter was at an age where she would be leaving school soon or whatever and then she would be moving on and she would want to find work as well. I think there are people who are missing out on coming to the region because they have a family and because the criteria are too strict in some circumstances.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Can I follow up on two of the issues that you raised. One is the Land Rover mechanic. Is there that much of a lack of skilled people in Australia? How widely does this person advertise?

**Ms Wilson**—They have advertised Australia wide. They are after a foreman as well. It does not have to be specifically Land Rover, but they would prefer that because that is the type of dealership that they are. Basically, even to get a mechanic who is well qualified to come to work for them has been impossible.

**CHAIR**—I see a lady at the back nodding very actively.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Can you be a bit more specific? I am sure we have got a lot of mechanics who are looking for work. Is it the skills that are missing? Is it the region? Is it because people do not want to move? What do you think it is specifically? I find it hard to believe that, with the amount of unemployment we have, there is not one mechanic out there who would say, 'Look, for the sake of a job that is well paying.' Is the employer willing to pay good wages? Is the package attractive enough to find someone here or is it unattractive? How do you get somebody from overseas to think, 'Well, this is a good bargain. This is a good deal'?

**Ms Wilson**—Basically, they have been advertising Australia wide and have not got any replies.

**Mr RIPOLL**—No replies at all?

**Ms Wilson**—No. If they have had a couple of replies, the people are not well enough qualified or they have not dealt with Land Rover.

**Mr RIPOLL**—It goes against the grain of normal day-to-day dealing with unemployed people – talking to Job Network agencies where there are at least hundreds of applications for nearly every job, dozens for the more skilled ones – that, specifically for a mechanic, you could not find one. I take your word for it – it is just surprising. Do you want to expand on that?

**Mr Whitehead**—By and large with so many of these positions – and there are a lot of very good packages offered in local government, in businesses, within country areas – people will not move to country communities. They will not – dare I say it – leave a lot of the creature comforts. They will not put up with the long drives.

**Mr RIPOLL**—So what incentives would you say are needed? As part of schemes or mechanisms, what further incentives would be necessary to induce people to come?

**Mr Whitehead**—To induce city people?

**Mr RIPOLL**—Yes.

**Mr Whitehead**—I do not know what you could offer – whether it be bigger packages. It is really a sea change, a lifestyle change, for people. There is nothing you could do, short of offering them a very exciting package, that would make people change that.

**Mr RIPOLL**—All right. We could probably discuss that one point for a fair while, but there is another point I want to raise. I am interested in why somebody who is long-term unemployed in, say, the city, who has skills – particularly more mature people who are unemployed and who might have those skills – and who cannot find a job and has no prospect of finding a job would not say, ‘Look, this is a bit of change for us, but at least we’ll have a decent income. We’ll be able to grow and do a lot of things. It might be good.’ There has got to be something missing in that equation for people not to do it.

There is another issue I want to raise – I have had experience with this in my electorate, and I am sure this is only a very minor part. Have you seen any abuse by employers in trying to get people here: where, like you said, they have a specific person in mind or there may be quite a number of people who could fill the job locally, but they specifically try to get somebody from overseas for a variety of reasons? I will not elaborate on the reasons. Do you see cases where you might say, ‘We’ve actually got a queue of people who could fill this. Why don’t you just take a local person?’

**Ms Lawson**—That is not actually the case because they have to show that they have advertised in Australia. They have to prove that they could not find anyone locally. A lot of them, out of desperation, then look overseas and find someone. I do not think that there are people queuing up for these positions because they have got to prove that that is not the case.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Are the majority of the ones that cannot be filled the higher skilled, higher level positions? Whereabouts in the spectrum would you say they are if you divide between lower skilled and middle to higher skilled? The positions that are not being filled: where would they be?

**Mr Whitehead**— Across the range.

**Ms Lawson**—It is not just necessarily ‘skilled’ in terms of having a degree but ‘skilled’ in terms of trades – good tradespeople as well with years of experience that do not necessarily fit into a nice little label like a mechanic or someone else does. Another instance I know – and we are getting specific here – is of a particular person who was a rose grafter. He specialises in rose grafting. With skilled migration when I looked up the occupation to see how many points he would get for his occupation there was no rose grafter in the occupation. I rang around and said, ‘Look, he’s highly skilled. He’s had X amount of years doing it and he has people working under him,’ and I was told he would probably get zero points for his occupation because it did not fit into a little category. Surely there is a problem with that.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Was that an overseas person?

**Ms Lawson**—That was an overseas person who was looking to come to this region.

**CHAIR**—But you could have brought him here under an employer nomination had a single employer been prepared to sponsor him.

**Ms Lawson**—There was an employer that was prepared to sponsor him but, because rose grafting is a seasonal thing, it would not have been for a two-year period of time, which is what it requires.

**CHAIR**—I see.

**Ms Lawson**—We looked at other ways of getting around that where he could apply for a temporary visa as he was thinking of maybe setting up his own business – come over here, get a temporary visa, set up his business and then reapply under the regional business skills category.

**Mr RIPOLL**—That is the other end. With somebody wanting to come in, to some extent I am less concerned about that in terms of regional Australia or trying to fill jobs here or trying to boost the economy in regional areas. So, if you have problems with people trying to come because they cannot fit neatly into a category, that is certainly a problem, but what about the employers here? I am more concerned about the employers here who say, ‘Look, we can’t find anyone to fill this position’ – for example, the Land Rover mechanic. I would think that something seriously needs to be done about somebody having a position available that no-one can fill because they just cannot find anybody. Surely there is an avenue to say we must be able to train somebody in the local area who is very close to those skills or to find somebody who lives nearby and to do something at that level.

**Ms Lawson**—In this instance there was an employer that was prepared to sponsor them and it was for the employer that they wanted this person to come out. It just so happened it was also in the interests of this person that he wanted to make this region his home, so it was definitely for the benefit of the employer.

In terms of the rest of your question, the employers that are out here are still looking for people. I think it is a mentality that a lot of city dwellers have that they do not want to settle in regional areas. Speaking from a personal point of view, I am a city person. I lived in Melbourne. I grew up there and I did not want to go out to a regional area. The biggest problem for me was realising that there was skilled employment for me in regional areas. I think it is a misconception of many people in the city areas that they will not find employment in a regional area because it has a lower population and may have higher unemployment. But it opens new doors and you may get other positions. So I think there is a mindset that you have to overcome if you want people in metropolitan areas to come out to regional areas.

**CHAIR**—I wonder if what you are talking about with the rose grower is part of that rigidity in the system that you mentioned in your submission. Is that how you would see it?

**Ms Lawson**—Yes. He would have definitely made it better for the region. He was going to add to the region and yet he did not fit the criteria so he could not come.

**Mrs MAY**—You also talk about a potential for streamlining the database with employment agencies, particularly in regional and rural communities. Can you expand on that – how you think we can look at that and how it would be advantageous to you in matching up those skills in your communities?

**Mr Whitehead**—Obviously it would be advantageous to the economy of the region ultimately in that, if certain skilled positions are staying vacant long term and are unable to be filled by a number of different mechanisms internally and domestically, in streamlining those with that skill database and if they can be filled ultimately you could put the argument that it is not taking away employment prospects from someone here but it is filling in that cog and benefiting the community.

**Mrs MAY**—So how do we streamline it or keep it up to date? I guess it is really an ongoing daily thing to keep it up to date with the skills and the people needed. Are those positions coming from employers on to that database so that where employers are looking for those skills they are the jobs that are on that database?

**Mr Whitehead**—Obviously we have got that range of input – employer needs coming into this program looking for employees that they cannot find, employer needs coming into the labour market providers as well, and also the existence of the database. If there is a way of cross-matching each of those, the domestic labour ones with the international ones, then that certainly needs to be looked at too. There seems to be so much potential for it at the moment and nobody is really working together.

**Mr ADAMS**—Is the Land Rover mechanic on the Net?



**Ms Wilson**—It has been a couple of times, yes.

**Mrs MAY**—There is still no take-up?

**Ms Wilson**— No take-up; nothing at all.

**Mr ADAMS**— I take it that the rose pruner or grafter was seen to have some potential, in the sense that there is an enormous industry around roses with pot pourri and other things. I take it that you saw the economic development there in that sense but that the bureaucratic structure of immigration did not allow you to get somebody with high skills?

**Ms Wilson**—That is the case. Because he was doing seasonal work, he wanted to work for the employer who wanted to sponsor him for the time it was taking. As well he was looking at setting up his own consulting business and training people to work underneath him, running it from this region but travelling throughout to where the roses were needed at times.

**Mr ADAMS**—I take your point about the regions and difficulties. I perhaps have an advantage over my colleagues because I have been on a regional committee in the last year as well. I have taken evidence from your organisation on that committee. There are difficulties of economic growth in different regional areas and also filling specific skills from the medical level right down to the Land Rover mechanic that we have here. Do we need regions to sell themselves better? As Ms Lawson was saying, once you get out there you find that there are great opportunities in regional Australia. Do we need to have regions selling themselves better? We need resources for that. What is your opinion on that? Also, if we do have skilled family migration into regions, do we need a statutory requirement that those people stay in those regions for a specific number of years – for example, five years or so?

**Mr Whitehead**—On the first part of the question, whether we need regions selling themselves better, you can take that one step back and say that first we have to look at what our clearly defined regions are and what are acting as regions. We have one here, the Green Triangle region, and there are a few others around Australia. Yes, some of the better functioning regions – and we would say there would be five or six in Australia – do a lot of marketing nationally and have a recognition within state and federal government of existing market programs and market themselves internationally. As far as assistance goes, it varies so much from state to state with state development programs for regions. Federally, we would trust that this would be something that would come out of the regional summit recommendations as well, but we wait to see those. Selling themselves overseas is something that we do need to see as far as the migration program goes. People do not know what they are going to. They have no idea what country Australia is about. On the second part of it, raising the statutory requirement from two years to potentially five years in the regions, that certainly is an option as well, although, as we have found so far, not one of the people we have brought in has shown after a length of time any signs of leaving that position and going back to the city again.

**Ms Lawson**—I would like to add, too, that when you say that regions need to market themselves better you need to ask the question, ‘Who do we need to market to?’ You have to make sure that you target the right people.

**CHAIR**—In your submission you suggested the formation of regional reference groups. Can you give us an idea of how you would see these working? For instance, who would we have on them, what would be their exact role and whom would they report to?

**Mr Whitehead**—This is the reporting mechanisms for the program?

**CHAIR**—You suggested the formation of regional reference groups. Your exact words were:

To ensure that a range of organizations in each region are consulted, including local government, industry, employment agencies and community groups, the Inquiry must examine the option of forming a series of State or regional reference groups to regularly report on the scheme.

**Mr Whitehead**—Too often you would find that a lot of reference and advisory groups in particular regions in country areas lack input from some part: they may be entirely local government with no industry or they may be from too much of one area. We are saying that it would really need input from all those areas – from local government and economic development; from local industry as well, on their needs; from a range of

industries as well; and also from community groups to make sure that the community input is there as well. We would say that so far in a lot of similar programs those reference groups have not had across-the-board representation.

**CHAIR**—Finally, Michael – as you are someone who is aware of the political process and is from this particular area – if someone gave you the job tomorrow of doing something about the scheme and making it work for the benefit of the Greater Green Triangle, what would you like to see?

**Mr Whitehead**—Were the resources to arrive in the mail tomorrow– and we would most probably be grateful that the mail came on a Saturday – we would certainly need to look at promoting the scheme more. There is a lot of tremendous promotion of similar schemes, but of this one there does not seem to be any public exposure – short of what the Green Triangle has put out as far as media releases, advertising, et cetera go.

**CHAIR**—So you want the department to put out something like ‘Does your region need more people? Why don’t you use this scheme?’

**Mr Whitehead**—We need something glossy from the department: ‘Does your industry or your business have any trouble getting staff?’

**CHAIR**—So you want more activity on the part of the government to make people in the region more aware of it.

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes, public targeted and industry specific, and working with particular industries on the program as well.

**CHAIR**—Okay – generally and also specifically to industries.

**Mr Whitehead**—Yes. It will not see a massive uptake overnight. As I think we also mention in our submission, to a lot of country businesses, skilled as they may be, taking on someone from overseas will be a last resort. But that is gradually changing; we are a changing community. But if that recognition is there they will utilise it. If there is a fairly straightforward method for them to utilise it as well – who to approach and who to go through –that ought also to be there.

**CHAIR**—Knowing who to go to. And that person would be a local person in your organisation.

**Mr Whitehead**—It would not be just selling ourselves. As we have said, we have continued to do it. The resources have not been there to run it – there have been zero resources to run it – but we have seen it as vital for the region. But it is only the local bodies who know where the needs are, who the people are and how to target it. Once you take that back to a state department based in a capital city or one of the biggest cities, you lose that completely and it dilutes it.

**Mrs MAY**—One thing that we have not raised is tapping into migrants who are already here on long-term visas. You raise that in your submission as a way of identifying people who may have skills you are looking for. Can you expand on that and on how you see that working?

**Ms Lawson**—I have found that those people I have come across who are here on long-term stay visas actually want to settle in Australia. They are here on temporary visas because that is all they could get. You need to look at why they can only get such a visa; I understand that. But, in the time that they are here, they do contribute to the community quite well, and perhaps what they have done while they have been here needs to be taken into account. If these people want to settle in Australia, perhaps they would be more willing to go to a regional area so that they could stay in Australia. If they can still contribute to the community and are still worthy of being in Australia, so to speak, they definitely should be looked at.

**Mrs MAY**— Would you see it as an age thing with some of those people – maybe they are too old and they have not met the criteria – or would you see it that their skills have not met the points or do not attract the points?

**Ms Lawson**—Yes. I would say that that is definitely a factor. The age factor is something that has not been brought up yet. A lot of the people that have come to us have been over the age of 45. You could comment more on that, Suzie.

**Ms Wilson**—Yes. A lot of them are over 45, there is no doubt. Basically, if they are very highly skilled it goes through as an exceptional appointment anyway, so that is not necessarily a problem. But maybe that needs to be looked at: is 45 a good age as their cut-off point?

**Mrs MAY**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—I think we have covered this but, just to be sure, have the employers who brought out people been satisfied? There have been no problems with that?

**Mr Whitehead**—Without exception.

**CHAIR**—Without exception. One hundred per cent satisfaction is pretty damned good. Thank you very much for appearing before us today. You will be sent a copy of the transcript. If you feel it misinterprets you in any way feel free to inform *Hansard* of the changes. If we have any other questions we will get back to you. Thank you.

We understand there are some regional councillors from the area in the audience. Officially on the program we are to have a break until 10.30 but, if you would like to address the committee, we would be very happy to hear you.

[10.04 a.m.]

**KEMFERT, Mr John Samuel, Councillor, Hindmarsh Shire Council**

**McCALLUM, Mrs Jean, Councillor, Glenelg Shire Council**

**CHAIR**—I welcome witnesses from the Mount Gambier Shire Council. Is that right?

**Mr Kemfert**—From Hindmarsh Shire, and that is not in South Australia. I am halfway between Melbourne and Adelaide, at Nhill

**CHAIR**—From Hindmarsh. I now welcome—

**Mr Kemfert**—And that is not where the bridge is.

**CHAIR**—I know. I have to tell you that I come from the electorate of Hindmarsh, so you and I do have something in common. And you are from?

**Mrs McCallum**—From the Shire of Glenelg, and that is also in Victoria, not South Australia.

**CHAIR**—And I live in the City of Glenelg, so between us we are totally confused. I now welcome councillors from the Shire of Hindmarsh and the Shire of Glenelg to give evidence.

**Mrs McCallum**—I might say I was purely here to have a look to see what it was all about as I really did not know. I am part of the Greater Green Triangle, and I am very new to it.

**CHAIR**—Please feel comfortable. These are regarded as proceedings of parliament. We take down in *Hansard* what you are saying, and I am sure there is no way you will mislead us so I do not have to give you any particular warnings.

**Mr ADAMS**—What is your opinion of migration into your regions?

**Mr Kemfert**—That is the reason I am here. At Nhill, we have a business running that is called Luv-A-Duck that produces ducks for all over Australia, all over the world. The executive officer came to us and said, 'Look, I want a foreman.' We have advertised on television and in newspapers, Australia wide, to get one. We had to go overseas. That was the point raised here before. In a region like Hindmarsh shire, with a house supplied, the package there, a motor car, we could not find a person. We are looking for people to work in the factory. All right, the job is not highly skilled: pulling the guts out of a duck is not really a high class job. It might not suit everybody, but the jobs are there and we can't fill those positions. To us that is important. We haven't got housing. If we did get people in there, we haven't got housing to accommodate those people.

**Mrs MAY**—If it is not such a highly skilled job, why can't you fill it from your own community?

**Mr Kemfert**—Within the Hindmarsh shire, especially at Nhill, unemployment is zero.

**Mrs MAY**—Zero unemployment?

**Mr Kemfert**—Yes.

**Mrs MAY**—Very good. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—So your problem is that you are not getting people moving from the rest of Australia to fill the jobs that you have and you would like to be able to bring them from overseas, but you tried to get this person from overseas to remove the stuffing out of the duck but you could not come into the program or -

**Mr Kemfert**—Surely there have to be people who would accept that sort of position. It is a full-time position.

**CHAIR**—How widely have you advertised around Australia for it?

**Mr Kemfert**—It has been on television on a number of occasions on our regional channel. It has been in the papers, both locally and in the *Herald Sun*, on a number of occasions.

**CHAIR**—If somebody took up the position, can you give us an indication of how much it would pay?

**Mr Kemfert**—No, I cannot.

**CHAIR**—If they move to your region then they would have to find accommodation. It is a problem to find accommodation in your region, is it?

**Mr Kemfert**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So it is a double whammy. Even if they took up the job, they would then have trouble finding somewhere to live in the region.

**Mr Kemfert**—It is. Rental accommodation is virtually non-existent and that is a problem.

**Mr ADAMS**—That is a problem here in this town as well. What is the local community doing about solving the accommodation problem?

**Mr Kemfert**—Council just started an estate where we are going to build houses, but that is going to take another 12 months before it eventuates. As I said before, the rental accommodation is virtually non-existent. Building houses is going to take a while. With our finances we are limited in terms of how many houses we can build in one go. We want to build three or four and then get people into them so that we have an income coming back in so we can build some more. But that is going to be a slow process.

**Mrs MAY**—What is the population of your community?

**Mr Kemfert**—I come back from China two years ago. I spoke at a dinner there and I said that I have 7,000 square kilometres and 7,000 people. A person said to me, 'I cannot believe it.' That is the size of the Hindmarsh Shire – 7,000 square kilometres with 7,000 people.

**CHAIR**—At least it is not crowded!

**Mr RIPOLL**—With this application, did anybody at all apply? Was anybody interested?

**Mr Kemfert**—No, no-one.

**Mr RIPOLL**—There was zero interest; no-one nearby was interested? That is an amazing concept.

**Mr Kemfert**—None. We got one from overseas but that is not the way I want to go. I want to employ people locally if I can within Australia. But if we cannot, we will have to go overseas.

**Mr RIPOLL**—If you have zero unemployment then there is no potential to employ anyone. It is a funny concept. I am just trying to discuss it with you a bit. How does a business grow in your shire if there is no unemployment? If I had a business and I had one staff member but I wanted to grow my business I could not because there is no-one to employ and you cannot attract anyone – it is a strange concept.

**Mr Kemfert**—It is a problem. Electricians cannot find apprentices. They cannot get anyone. Electricians and plumbers are the two tradespeople who are most affected.

**Mrs MAY**—What about your young people? What happens to them? You have a high school there, undoubtedly.

**Mr Kemfert**—We have three colleges within the shire. The last time I attended a college I said to the boys in the last year of their education, 'Who wants to be a farmer?' I looked around the room and one boy put his hand up eventually and I said, 'What's the matter with the rest of you?' One boy said, 'I'm sick and tired of hearing Mum and Dad arguing at dinnertime and saying, "The wool prices are poor. The wheat prices are poor. I've got no money. I can't send you away for a holiday. I can't buy you the new bike you want."' He said, 'I don't want any part of farming.' So they go away. Consequently, we lose young people who would take up an apprenticeship or who would work for somebody. They are sick and tired of the whole set-up that our rural community is going through at this point of time.

**Mrs MAY**—So they are leaving and going to the cities?

**Mr Klemfert**—Yes. And of course the lights are always brighter out there. We have all done it. We have all gone down and had a look at the big bright lights. But hopefully some of those will come back some time. But they have not at this point in time.

**Mrs MAY**—So your population is ageing, then, because you are not keeping your young people there?

**Mr Klemfert**—It certainly is, yes.

**Mrs MAY**—It is very difficult.

**CHAIR**—Going back to the duck plucker, or the duck inside plucker, you said you eventually got that person from overseas, is that right?

**Mr Klemfert**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How did you get them from overseas? What was the process? Do you remember?

**Mr Klemfert**—The firm advertised through our CEO and an employment agency, I think. I am not real certain.

**CHAIR**—Did they come in on a temporary visa or a permanent one?

**Mr Klemfert**—Permanent.

**CHAIR**—So you would have gone through the Greater Green Triangle office?

**Mr Klemfert**—Yes, I would assume so, because we belong to the Greater Green Triangle.

**CHAIR**—And the person who wanted this would have signed a declaration form that they wanted this person for two years?

**Mr Klemfert**—I cannot answer that. I do not know.

**CHAIR**—So that you could not get that?

**Mr Klemfert**—No.

**Mr ADAMS**—Is the duck plucker –

**CHAIR**—Duck inside plucker, I think.

**Mr Klemfert**—No. That person that came down is a foreman. He is not just a casual labourer. He is highly skilled in the process of doing ducks.

**Mrs MAY**—So it is a managerial position, not just unskilled?

**Mr Klemfert**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—That makes it clear.

**Mr Klemfert**—His salary package is in the \$60,000 plus motor car plus –

**CHAIR**—Does that answer your question?

**Mr ADAMS**—Yes. It reminds me of ‘I am not a duck plucker but a duck plucker’s son’. I think there is a song, is there not? I am sure it is sung in that factory. But one has to plan business. If your business is expanding, somebody should maybe have been looking a little bit more at the needs of that business, in the sense of the longer term. Don’t you think that if a business grows so fast it has to accept some responsibility to deal with itself and its employment needs? It has to make some sort of opportunity of dealing with itself, like the housing of its employees, et cetera.

**Mr Klemfert**—Can I go back just a little bit? That business has doubled in the last five years in employment and production. It went from 25 to 50 or –

**Mr ADAMS**—Sure. I know a lot about food and I know that ducks are very scarce to get and chefs are battling to get ducks around Australia.

**Mr Klemfert**—These are ducks specially bred for the industry. But, if a business keeps doubling every five years or thereabouts, it is hard to foresee the needs. The infrastructure in a town is quite often not really geared for that sort of an influx. That takes a bit of organising.

**Mrs MAY**—Did you attract that business to your town or has it been there for a long time?

**Mr Klemfert**—No; it started from an egg and grew into a chicken and just –

**Mrs MAY**—Grew into a duck. And has done very well, by the sounds of it.

**Mr Klemfert**—It has done. It is known all over the world. Especially when you go to China, they know all about Luv-A-Duck in Nhill.

**CHAIR**—They are all ducks for eating?

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**Mr Klemfert**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—They are not using the down?

**Mr Klemfert**—I think that is being used. Everything is being used.

**CHAIR**—So all parts of the duck.

**Mr ADAMS**—And the feet go to China, do they?

**Mr Klemfert**—Everything goes to China, if they can produce enough. But the local trade takes up about 70 per cent of what is produced.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps we could just move to Mrs McCallum. Don't go away. Mrs McCallum, have you anything you would like to add to this conversation from the point of view of your shire?

**Mrs McCallum**—I was just going to add on to some of Michael's report and state that Casterton would not have survived the last 14 years if we had not had doctors from overseas. We had an Irish doctor for 14 years. The second doctor also came also from Ireland, and he has just left. He was there for 10 years.

**CHAIR**—Can I ask where he went? Did he go back to Ireland after 10 years?

**Mrs McCallum**—No, they have gone to the Queensland area or Canberra. Their families are growing up, and they feel that there are not enough opportunities in a small area for their children. They feel that they can move away and get better tertiary education without their children having to go so far away. There have also been changes in the town in the last 14 or 15 years: there is not quite as much employment and as many young people around. It is perhaps not as interesting a type of doctoring as they feel they would like to do. There are lots of reasons why they move, and the reasons are the same as why other doctors from the cities do not come out to you.

We have a very good hospital, and visiting specialists come in on a weekly basis to Casterton. They also go to the base hospital in Hamilton to look at other operations and new things in the industry. They are well catered for in that they are not entirely on their own and not isolated. The hospital has telecommunications, TV communications, so that they can keep up with any new processes that they need to know about. A lot of work has been done so that they are not isolated, but when they get to a certain stage, particularly with their children, they still feel that they want to move on.

We had one of them replaced by a doctor from England who stayed seven months and fitted very well into the community. The family had a Malaysian background. Regarding some of Michael's comments about overseas people who stand out in a small community, it did not make any difference to these people. They were very welcome. But the wife felt very lonely, and they moved to be closer to her family. So it is important to have family support around the people, or perhaps people from the same country around them.

We are now in the process of getting two new doctors in the area. Two South Africans will be moving in. One has actually moved into the town – he will start work in a fortnight – and the other doctor will start in a month's time. I am not sure about the first doctor, but the doctor that is coming in a month's time has been living and working in Australia and is shifting from Queensland down to us. They both have young families. So we have them, I think, for at least a number of years until their children grow up.

I was interested in the motor mechanic matter, because my husband is a motor mechanic. I can speak only about our area, but in the last 15 years the apprenticeship system has changed greatly in Victoria. Fifteen years ago, a child could be at school, have a very good tech wing in the high school and do a lot of his technical work there. If he wanted to be a mechanic, a plumber or whatever, a lot of the first year subjects could be taught at school. A person leaving school in year 10, 11 or 12 might have had the first 12 months of that apprenticeship finished when they left school so that there were only three years before the employer had a fully qualified person.

Our apprentices at Casterton caught a bus that took them to Hamilton for one day a week to the tech school – TAFE as it is called now – and that was their further education in the business and they worked in the garage for the rest of the week. Now, you have three blocks of three weeks where that apprenticeship is carried on in

Melbourne. So an employer has his person gone for nine weeks in a block, you can say, and those three weeks might be the busiest part of the year for him. So it is of no use to him to have an apprentice.

The paperwork that is involved with apprenticeships has also put a lot of our employers off. I have asked a couple of them who had had apprentices for as long as I can remember why they do not have them, and they simply state that with the paperwork and the time that they are away, including that three-year block – and of course there are the add-ons that every industry has – they just feel that it is not worth it. But there are kids in the town who want to be mechanics, panel beaters, electricians, painters, et cetera. There are jobs there to a certain extent, but the employer does not want to go through the hassle of the apprenticeship system.

**Mr ADAMS**—There are group training companies now that may be there.

**Mrs McCallum**—A lot of them use the group training system, but that does not help. There are a lot more people who want the jobs than the group system will take. Because nobody is putting on apprentices, they are now going overseas for qualified people when, in actual fact, there are people here who want those jobs and should be getting those jobs.

**Mr ADAMS**—True. That is a trend though that has occurred in Australia: employees want to pick someone off the shelf when they want someone; they do not want to train them. We have that difficulty.

**Mrs McCallum**—That is right. We should be looking at our apprenticeship system to see what is wrong with it.

**Mr ADAMS**—I agree. Is vocational training out of your TAFE colleges in your region coming back in a sense? Are there some areas where they are looking at exactly what you are talking about?

**Mrs McCallum**—Yes. Our TAFE institutes in the region have been upgraded. Portland and Hamilton have both got bigger programs now.

**Mr ADAMS**—We need to get some qualifications into this duck-plucking job – to build the job into a certified job – so that, when you get some broader qualifications or broader skills when you pluck ducks, it makes it more attractive.

**CHAIR**—Are there any more questions for the two councillors?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—On the same theme that was just being discussed, I was rather astounded by the comments about the experiences of Luv-A-Duck. I would have thought that, with a highly specialised business such as this, the company might have looked internally to promote the people to do this. This is a uniquely specialised craft. I wonder if the person who finally did get it was a selected person. Were they targeted and did the company go through the whole exercise in order to get that person into Australia? I suppose some would say there has been some manipulation of these types of schemes over the years. The one that sprang to mind when we were talking about the duck experience was the ‘chicken sexers’ when we had to allegedly go to Korea to get people who could determine the sex of chickens, which proved to be somewhat of a scam later on. Would it be untoward of me to ask that, when you receive the transcript of your evidence, you show it to the company, and perhaps they might, if they care to, provide us with the exact details of what went on in this particular case, because it does seem to be a bit unusual that a foreman could not be promoted from within their own ranks. I think that, if I was working in that particular company and found out that someone had to be brought in from overseas to do a supervisory role, I would feel a bit left out and would not necessarily have a commitment to the business that an employee in an area such as yours should be expected to have.

**Mr Kemfert**—I will clarify that a bit more. I think this was a higher position than foreman. It was more of an industrial chemist position, looking after breeding and poultry, instead of looking after staff. It was not that sort of a position.



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**CHAIR**—It involved considerable expertise that may not have been available in the company?

**Mr Kemfert**—Yes. The expertise may not have been available within the company – that is right.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Your evidence told us that it was a foreman. What you told the committee is all I can go on; that is why I have asked that you perhaps show it to the company.

**CHAIR**—It is always difficult to find the right word to describe things. Is there anything else, Mrs McCallum, that you would like to add?

**Mrs McCallum**—I would like to follow up with a point regarding what has been said about housing. We are certainly finding at the moment that good quality housing is missing in our town, and it is certainly stopping a development in a changing land use that is occurring in our area. Housing is important for development and jobs. The change in land use from broadacre farming to blue gum forestry has shown up. We have several companies operating in the area, but they will not live in Casterton because there are not enough good houses for their managers. So they are actually operating out of Hamilton and Portland, although the development in their business is happening 100 kilometres away.

**CHAIR**—And there is no entrepreneurial builder who is going to come in and say, ‘Ha, ha! There is a need for some really nice houses here. I’m going to put them in.’

**Mrs McCallum**—At the moment there certainly is not anybody who is willing and who has the time – they are all busy doing other things – to put in good quality housing. Through local government we have also found it rather difficult to get qualified people to move from the city to rural areas. It took us six months to get a qualified physical services man.

**CHAIR**—Physical services?

**Mrs McCallum**—Engineering, managing and those types of things. We finished up getting somebody from another rural area.

**CHAIR**—Headhunting goes on.

**Mrs McCallum**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Kemfert and Mrs McCallum, for unexpectedly appearing as witnesses for us today. We do appreciate it.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.29 a.m. to 11.05 a.m.**

**OHLMEYER, Mr Benjamin Geoffrey, Partner/Manager, Westvic Pump Sales**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. For my information, what sorts of pumps does Westvic Pump Sales sell? Are they for rural properties or are they industrial pumps?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—We relocated to Warrnambool seven years ago, primarily for industry and water board work. We do not get involved in the rural community as such – the farmers are already covered within the area.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask you some questions about your submission?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes, thank you for this opportunity. We were asked by the Greater Green Triangle Region Association to be present today. We became involved with the association some 12 months ago. We recruited a nominee from South Africa, who arrived in July on an RSMS visa application. He was granted a full visa and has been with us since that time. He moved out with his wife and family of four daughters. They have bought themselves a house in Warrnambool. Personally, we have just moved from Adelaide. In moving to regional Victoria, we have had some experiences that perhaps other people may not have had the privilege to experience. We have been there for seven years. Originally, the move was as a divisional office of All Pump Supplies Adelaide, as a single operator with Adelaide support. We now have eight employees with us today – six of whom are local Warrnambool personnel.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to say any more or are you ready for some questions?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—I think your questions will bring out some of the points I want to make.

**CHAIR**—Fine. Thank you very much for your submission. I take it that you are very much in support of this program because it has helped your organisation. As you said in your submission, following bringing somebody here from overseas you have increased your sales 96 per cent.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes, that is right. It was quite marked. We found our experiences with the Greater Green Triangle Region Association very positive. I understand that certain areas do not have that regional body to support their requirements.

**CHAIR**—Could you tell us what skills the worker had that you brought out and what you had done to try to get someone with those skills in Australia.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—That is a good question. We were looking for a technical sales representative. We advertised locally in the *Standard* and in the Melbourne papers, as well as through a national employment agency, which obviously has access Australia-wide, with no response other than from a tradesperson with no appropriate skills out of Melbourne.

**CHAIR**—Do you think you found it difficult to get this person because it was in a region or because it was a skill that not many people in Australia had?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—It was more a regional problem.

**CHAIR**—You could not get people out of the cities into Warrnambool.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—There is a certain mentality, if I can put it that way, within regional communities that somewhat stagnates their growth. There are certain areas of business which could do well in regional communities but really there are not those within those communities to give rise to such arrangements. We moved from Adelaide with very little market research into the area. We did not anticipate anything like the response we got from local industry and the local community, dairy industry like Nestles and Murray Goulburn, larger corporations, and water boards who would primarily look to city areas exclusively and say, 'If you want the best price and the best selection, that is where you go.' There have been no regional based businesses to be able to give them any other alternative. It has meant that locally produced cash, if you like to call it that, has been basically filtered out of the community to metropolitan centres.

**CHAIR**—How did you locate this person?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—We have a friend in Melbourne who was a migration agent. He had notice from a man in South Africa who sought to leave the country. He had no diplomas and came in under an ‘exceptional appointment’. They forwarded the details of this nominee to us and through discussions we eventually got him within our organisation.

**CHAIR**—And it worked out well for everybody.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—It did. You might ask how we found out about the RSMS. I would have to say that there is very little public knowledge within the regional communities of these sorts of schemes. Advertising was referred to earlier – there is no real advertising approach. If it was not for the migration agent with whom we are associated on a –

**CHAIR**—On a friendship basis.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—On a friendship basis, we would not have been aware of these possibilities.

**CHAIR**—So there could be many other businesses out there who do not happen to have a friend who is a migration agent who are missing out.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Could you tell us how much your organisation actually spent in advertising to fill the vacancy that was in existence? Do you have an idea of that?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—The employment agency we have used a number of times for recruiting school leavers on apprenticeship schemes, and they as a gesture of goodwill, I suppose, initiated the whole program for nothing. I suppose that is one of the community arrangements you find in regional areas a little more than you do in a metropolitan centre. Other than that, it was the cost involved in normal local paper and metropolitan advertising, which may have amounted to a few hundred dollars.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So the total cost was a few hundred dollars. You did not advertise nationally?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—We did advertise nationally through a national employment agency, who have their methods of approaching the public.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Sorry, my definition of advertising is that which appears in the public arena. The Employment National stuff and other job seeking agencies do not come into my definition. It is probably on my part. In terms of media, did you advertise nationally?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—The *Age*, if you call that a national newspaper. The national employment agency used the Internet. From that point of view, I would have thought we were reasonably well covered.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—There are some requirements in this scheme to recruit Australian labour, local labour, for the job. I am wondering what efforts your company used to utilise that employment of Australians in the job in the first instance. That is why I have been a little bit specific on the dollars and cents expenditure.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Let me go back a step or two. I came from Adelaide. I had experience in a well-run organisation there for seven or eight years before we moved to regional Victoria. Our reason for moving was for the church; it was not for the promotion of regional business exactly. I would not have gone – as a city dweller, I see no future in country communities. I have some extracts here out of the last three weeks worth of newspaper articles – one regarding Gippsland and the departure of young people from the country and another one, from the *Weekly Times*, regarding the departure of young people from country Victoria.

Yesterday in the local newspaper there was an article regarding the government's attempts to get teachers to smaller regional towns. The mentality that is put across from the media and plus the general way we live, as I see it, is: ‘Why move to the country? There is no future there.’ I think that is the message that a lot of people in metropolitan areas of Australia are getting. We need to reverse that. Until we reverse that, I doubt we are going to get too many skilled personnel out of the city areas. That is where I see migrants as being a valuable resource to promote the prosperity of country areas in view of attitudes being changed.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I accept what you are saying on the macro level, but part of this committee's work is to examine how the macro level is working. What I am doing with you is asking specific questions of

how you utilised the requirements that are currently in place. For example, was your advert in the *Age* newspaper under the classifieds or was it a display advert?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—The advertisement that was put in the newspaper was at least a double column arrangement.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So it was display?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—It would be a substantial cost. Did you get that for in the region of \$300, did you?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—You have got me on the spot.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Could you take that on notice? I am sorry to be picky but it is an important element of all of the schemes that we are looking at, this recruiting of local labour. In my experience as a member of parliament, I have had instances where people have come to me in order to get relatives through who do not meet the normal requirements of the migration program and they seek to use other methods, rorting the system. So I am just wondering with these systems that we have in place – which are having some limited success and some limited failures, I might add – what can be done to improve them. That is why we have been specific in our questioning.

Another question comes up on this person who came in in the exceptional category and, therefore, did not have a degree, diploma or possibly trade qualifications. Who was the body testing those qualifications and skills that they had?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—We looked into it extensively. We had, should I say, approximately 10 letters of reference from our nominee from previous acquaintances in South Africa. It went through the Greater Green Triangle Region Association, who obviously gave approval to DIMA for visa approval.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So it was the green triangle that tested it on the basis of the references that came in. Is this person part of the church as well?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Thank you very much.

**Mrs MAY**—Once you identified this person, how did you find the process? You went through the Greater Green Triangle. Did they do a lot of the work for you? Did you find the process restrictive or rigid? Were there any problems with the application or, bearing in mind that this is an exceptional person with no tertiary qualifications, did it go through with the recommendation of the Greater Green Triangle?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—It went through with a recommendation of the Greater Green Triangle finally. We did have a hang-up from Pretoria over what we would have classified as a very minimal issue on a medical record. Our nominee had had a kidney stone six years prior and, for that very reason, it was held up a couple of months while the Australian health authority passed that as a non-issue.

**Mrs MAY**—What was the age of the person you ended up employing?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—36.

**Mrs MAY**—And married with a family?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—This is really not relevant at all, but I was curious when the Deputy Chair asked whether he was a member of the church and you replied, 'Yes, he was.' What church are you talking about?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—We are one of the Brethren.

**CHAIR**—Was that a requirement at all of the person you were hiring – that you would have liked them to have been part of the Brethren?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—It was never a requirement; hence our national advertising. Take our industry, for example – and I think it applies to all industries within western Victoria that market to water boards and general dairy-

cum-mining conglomerates: our competition is out of Melbourne. There are no major regional businesses there to give skilled answers to difficult applications in those sorts of organisations.

**CHAIR**—Was part of what you found attractive about this person from South Africa the fact that he was a member of the Brethren? Obviously he had the qualifications you wanted, but was it an added attraction for you that he was a member of the Brethren?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—It would have been an added attraction, yes. Yes, it was.

**Senator BARTLETT**—I would not mind exploring a bit more of your statement. I was not quite sure of the context of the direction you were getting at about the mentality in regional areas that militates against growth. Are you saying that it is the mentality of people in the cities about regional areas or the mentality within the regions themselves that holds things back?

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Both. I grew up in a city area. The metropolitanism is very strong in Australia. If you go to places like Germany – although I have never been, and someone might want to correct me – every small community seems to have its own little industrious centre. It gives rise to better roads, and you have a strong economy. There is German renowned quality and it has given rise to a strong economy.

I see the centralisation that has taken place in Australia, be it for whatever reason. It is the way we have been brought up. We see it as normal – whether it is normal. We have moved out. We have seen the plight of local communities, what was referred to earlier as mum and dad complaining. They were brought up that way from the cot, but when they have come to their teenage years what alternative have they got? That is the way they have been taught – that life is in the city. Well, is it? Can we encourage certain facilities out into the country areas with a view of saving these smaller places?

**Senator BARTLETT**—So you are saying as a generalised statement that among people in the regions there is almost a negative mindset that has got too much of a hold over people.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—There can be. Bringing in migrants can help that. It is like a breath of fresh air; we are saying, ‘Look, we’ve got potential here.’

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Ohlmeyer, for appearing before the committee today. You will be sent a transcript for you to check. If we have any more answers we want from you, the committee will write.

**Mr Ohlmeyer**—Thank you very much.

**CHAIR**—I wish you well with your business.

[11.25 a.m.]

**JOYCE, Mr Warwick, Migration agent**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. I now invite you to make an opening statement.

**Mr Joyce**—I have a brief statement to make. I have been involved with the RSMS for about 18 months. I come from Adelaide and we have had a number of cases in Adelaide, Mount Gambier and in Warrnambool. I have also had a bit to do with other areas such as Ballarat and Bendigo. I just wanted to tell the committee that the scheme, as a whole, has a lot of very good features about it. I believe it is encouraging regional migration, as it is meant to. At the same time there are some issues that should be addressed. I also want to indicate that it is no pushover for a person to be granted a permanent visa under the RSMS. It takes a real commitment on the part of an employer. We have heard this morning about employers offering employment and the sorts of salary packages they are offering. For an employer in a regional area to offer a salary package of \$60,000 plus a vehicle is a real commitment. Even in a city, with a good business, that is a real commitment. I believe anything we can do to strengthen employers in that situation we should give consideration to.

It is also a real commitment on the part of the employee, because they are committing themselves to work for this employer for two years. They have to be committed even to go through the process, which can take a long time. I have case histories that I could draw on where it has been month after month after month of working with particularly Immigration case officers. I am not being critical – it is just the system – but perhaps there is need of education within the department of immigration that we are here to encourage skilled people to come to Australia, particularly regional Australia. Perhaps some educational process should be employed there. What I heard this morning reinforces what I have found.

**CHAIR**—Do you deal directly with the immigration department, if you are bringing somebody through one of these regional schemes, or do you go through the Greater Green Triangle or the local body?

**Mr Joyce**—It is a two-stage process, as you would know. The first, what I call the nomination stage, would be done with the regional certifying body, such as the Greater Green Triangle. So a proposal would be put up. We might have a proposal of 30 or 40 pages that just puts the case that we have a position that we wish to be filled by a skilled person. That is who we deal with there. Then approval is received – usually from the RCB, the regional certifying body; other times it comes from DIMA saying that the nomination has been successful. Sometimes the certifying body gives the letter of approval and sometimes DIMA gives the letter of approval.

**CHAIR**—How do they decide which one?

**Mr Joyce**—I do not know.

**CHAIR**—Yes, it is all a mystery to you.

**Mr Joyce**—This is one of the things I would like to bring up. There is great variety in the way things are being handled around the country by various regional certifying bodies. In Adelaide the South Australian government body, which seems to be changing names at a fairly rapid rate, has a meeting with –

**CHAIR**—I think it is the economic development board, or has it changed since I last looked?

**Mr Joyce**—It is economic development or state development.

**CHAIR**—The state development board.

**Mr Joyce**—It has a meeting every Thursday with a DIMA representative and what we used to call the department of labour and industry, now DEWRSB. They have a meeting every Thursday when they discuss the nominations. They have developed a good system that has worked well for that area. I guess the Greater Green Triangle would look at it themselves and then pass it on to DIMA for looking at. Does that answer your question?

**CHAIR**—Yes. I am interested because obviously I have accessed the scheme myself to help my own constituents in Adelaide and I have not found this difficulty that you seem to be having. As I think has been pointed out before, it depends on the regions as to exactly what system is being used.

**Mr Joyce**—We have not had any difficulty with the RCB in Adelaide. It has been more through Immigration.

**CHAIR**—That is what I mean. I got the impression that the RCB was very much the final decision maker and it was almost a given that Immigration just ticked off.

**Mr Joyce**—That is what you would think. If you look at the regulations, that is the way it reads, but it is not what happens in practice.

**CHAIR**—So you think Immigration is looking over its shoulder?

**Mr Joyce**—Very much so. In fact, we have had cases where the RCB has approved it and Immigration have approved the nomination as an exceptional appointment but then written a letter back to Pretoria saying, ‘We don't really think this is an exceptional appointment.’

**CHAIR**—Really?

**Mr Joyce**—Basically vetoing the whole thing.

**CHAIR**—And you have evidence of that that you could provide for us? I do not mean here today, but could you give us that?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—We would appreciate it very much if we could have a look at that as a case study. I suspect all of my colleagues would like to follow this up with you.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I would certainly appreciate receiving that if the department are saying one thing on one hand and a different thing on the other hand.

**Mr Joyce**—We are dealing with individual case officers. Each case officer, to some extent, is autonomous.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—And is a decision maker.

**Mr Joyce**—He is a decision maker. So with one case officer it would be fine, but with another you could have real difficulty.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Is your work as a migration agent mainly South African work?

**Mr Joyce**—It includes South African.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Wholly?

**Mr Joyce**—Not wholly.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—There are a couple of things in your submission which I need a bit of clarification on. You refer at the end of the paragraph to the matter of children over 18 years living at home but not usually included as part of the family unit. Are you saying that in the context of the regional sponsored migration schemes or as a global thing for migration generally?

**Mr Joyce**—I am saying it from the point of view of regional, but obviously it applies generally. It applies to any application for a permanent visa, because they are looking at what a member of a family unit is.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So it is not an additional hurdle in terms of regional sponsored migration as opposed to general migration?

**Mr Joyce**—No, but it is one that is affecting regional migration.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—It is a common denominator.

**Mr Joyce**—Definitely, yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So there is a consistency in the migration program in that regard.

**Mr Joyce**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—You mention the regulations at the bottom of that paragraph. I am at a loss to see how those regulations relate to the regional sponsored skills migration schemes in their total.

**Mr Joyce**—Do you mean that you cannot see how they apply?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—As I read the regulations that you have provided to the committee, they all apply in the refugee and humanitarian categories rather than in these particular categories.

**Mr Joyce**—No, they do also apply in these categories.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Can you then be specific as to how (a) to (i) applies?

**Mr Joyce**—Sorry?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—The (a) to (i) in subparagraph 2.

**Mr Joyce**—I am particularly referring to regulation 1.05A, definition of ‘dependant’. That is a new definition of ‘dependant’. The previous definition of ‘dependant’ was a person wholly or substantially dependent on another person for financial, psychological or physical support. Over a number of years, there have certainly been a number of Federal Court decisions where that definition has allowed children over 18 who may not be dependent for financial support to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter to be considered as dependants.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I am looking at this one page in isolation from the whole of the amendments and (2) states:

... (the *first person*) is dependent on another person for the purposes of an application for—

Then it goes through (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) down to (i). Are you saying that this definition applies to the global migration program?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes, it does. What they are saying is that subsection (1) applies unless subregulation (2) applies.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Where does it say that?

**Mr Joyce**—At the top it says:

Subject to subregulation (2)

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Thank you.

**Mr Joyce**—I actually have a DIMA client information sheet on this. If the committee would like to have it, you are welcome to it. It is turning people away from Australia and, more particularly, regional areas.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Yes, that would be good. Thank you very much for that.

**CHAIR**—Is it the wish of the committee that this document be received as evidence for the inquiry? There being no objection, it is so ordered. We are looking at a regional migration. We are trying to get people here into the regions. One of the problems you are finding is that a family wants to come but this excludes those members of the family who are over 18. The family unit does not want to be broken up. That would discourage some people from coming because they cannot come as an entire family unit. Is that the general point you are making?

**Mr Joyce**—Exactly. One of the cases I refer to is a man currently in Ireland who has had 20 years experience in the medical and rehabilitation field. A company wants to sponsor him to get a branch going in Bendigo. He was all ready to go and all fired up. But when he found he could not bring his one or two children – I forget how many – with him, he said, ‘I am not going to leave my family behind.’

**CHAIR**—You could get a situation where he could bring his wife and dependants. Say he had four children. He could bring three of the children because they were still under the age but he could not bring the one over 18 who was not financially dependent.

**Mr Joyce**—That is right. He would be forced to leave one child behind in Ireland in that case.

**CHAIR**—Once they got here, couldn’t he bring that child in as the final relative?

**Mr Joyce**—It is very difficult.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Why take the risk?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes. It is a very difficult area.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Why go through the trouble?



**Mr Joyce**—And he just does not want to be separated from his family. I have another case, which I refer to there where a man has come in on what we call a 457 four-year temporary visa. This is a Mount Gambier case. He is somewhere in town, I guess. He is applying for a permanent visa, but under even current regulations – and I will come back to that – he has been told that he can stay but his daughter, who is over 18, will have to go back. He says, ‘Hang on.’ The point I was going to make is that these amendments were actually effective on 1 November. They were tabled in parliament on 22 November. They were available from AusInfo on 29 October. These amendments just tighten up the regulations to what the department really wants. The pre 1 November 1999 regulations I read out before are still being used by the department to exclude these children. Despite Federal Court judgments, they still use that because it is their basic policy – ‘If you are over 18, we don’t want you here.’

**CHAIR**— I do not think that is an articulated policy by any stretch of the imagination. Now that you have had a look at that, Senator McKiernan, do you want to continue those questions?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—No. It is somebody else's turn.

**CHAIR**— As for the 18-year-old who was told she had to go home, did she have any skills? Could she have got a job here?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes, she could have got a job, but she would not have had any special skills. In fact, I believe she has got a job.

**CHAIR**—She is currently employed?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes.

**Senator BARTLETT**—I have a couple of questions about your experiences. Firstly, I am assuming that your main focus comes from people approaching you who want to migrate here rather than businesses here approaching you to try to get someone for them?

**Mr Joyce**—We get both, yes.

**Senator BARTLETT**—In what sort of proportion?

**Mr Joyce**—I would probably get more employers who say, ‘Look, we have found this person who has the expertise level.’ It is a shrinking world, and they may have received contact from somebody trying to get a job. For example, you might have somebody in the metallurgy industry who is a metallurgist or a chemical engineer. The man I am thinking of came to Australia with his company and while he was here he saw a business and went to see them and said, ‘I would love to live in Australia.’ They said, ‘We would love to have you.’ They came along to me and said, ‘How do we get this man in?’

**Senator BARTLETT**—The issue with these schemes, as I understand it, is that before a person like that would be able to work for that company that company would have to demonstrate that they were not able to fill the position locally from local labour. Is that correct?

**Mr Joyce**—That is an interesting point, and there has been a lot of discussion here this morning about advertising. The RSM Scheme, as per the regulations, does not require advertising. Under the regulations advertising is not required; it is a concession to the regional scheme. Under employer nomination, ENS, which is the new 856 visa, it is required, but with the RSMS it is not required. Almost universally, advertising is carried out because it is the expectation of DIMA that you have done advertising. I have had cases where somebody has their employee – they know they cannot find anyone because they have been looking around for a long time in a specialised area – and yet they have had to go out and advertise.

**CHAIR**—And bring it in under the employer nomination?

**Mr Joyce**—Someone asked about how much advertising was. I know that \$2,100 was one figure that somebody had to spend to satisfy the quasi-request.

**Senator BARTLETT**—In terms of that sort of thing – and I am just thinking about it from the employers' or businesses' point of view – if they have a legitimate vacancy which they are keen to fill to help them operate more effectively or whatever, how much of a problem is it, assuming that they genuinely cannot find anyone to fill it locally but they have identified someone from overseas? How long does it take to process that and to go

through it all? Do you have a backlog of people that you could potentially whip into some of those spots or would you have to start from scratch with a particular identified person over in Ireland or South Africa or wherever?

**Mr Joyce**—The cases I have worked on would be more like that. It would vary, obviously, but it would probably be about two to three months for a nomination to be approved and then immigration can take anything up to 14 months – that is the longest I have had.

**Senator BARTLETT**—Apart from being a problem for the potential migrant, what happens if you have taken 14 months and they are just about to approve it and someone walks in locally and says, 'I am perfect for that job'?

**Mr Joyce**—That is a good point, except that in cases where they are specialist people it is not very likely.

**Mrs MAY**—I would like you to clarify something. You said that under RSMS it is not mandatory to advertise. You are saying that DIMA is asking you to advertise. Are they actually requesting that?

**Mr Joyce**—They will not process it unless that has happened.

**Mrs MAY**—Even though it is not a requirement?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes.

**Mrs MAY**—So you are saying that our officers will not process without the advertising. You have to demonstrate that that advertising has taken place?

**Mr Joyce**—That is what happens. In fact, the RCBs realise that if they do not advertise then their chance of getting it up is very slim.

**Mrs MAY**—Okay.

**Mr RIPOLL**—What process is there? It is fine to say that you are required to or that you do advertise but, in a sense, so what? You put an ad in the paper and you get six applications, you stick them in the bottom drawer and who is to know? What process does DIMA put forward to say, 'How do we know that from those advertisements we have not had applications?'

**Mr Joyce**—Often a company will use a personnel placements agency and DIMA may ring them up and ask them how they got on with that position. We would have to provide evidence from that employment agency that they have advertised the position – evidence of the newspaper advertisements. I guess it is open to someone lying about it.

**Mr RIPOLL**—I do not mean so much someone lying about it but if you receive, say, four or five applications, you look at them and you say, 'This is not what we are looking for' and you just throw them out or ignore them or whatever. In my opinion, I think that by the time an employer has made the decision it would be a fairly big step to say, 'We are looking overseas.' Their mind is made up; they have spent time and money and what have you to get to that point. There really is no more consideration for a local person. That is it. Once they have decided they are going through the process, it is obviously costing them money and so if they are going to commit to national advertising and the rest of it to meet the requirements then the decision is pretty much made in their own minds and so they are just going to follow through on that process. Would that be right?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes, I agree. All I am saying is that, it is difficult for a small business to have to go to that trouble. We have heard from people from regional areas. We have had one case – I think I referred to it there – in a town called Cunderdin, which has – and my statistics will be somewhere near it – about 750 people and is 100 kilometres east of Perth. That business has a turnover of between \$1 million and \$2 million. The owner of the business – it is in automotive; it is not Land Rovers but I think it is John Deeres or something; automotive and agricultural equipment – wanted someone to help manage his business to look after the accounts. He was a great mechanic but he was not too good on the accounts. So he was trying to get someone to go to Cunderdin. He had a lot of trouble. Eventually he found this man and the department insisted on national advertising. He had advertised locally. He had advertised in the Perth metropolitan paper but they said, 'No, you must advertise

in the whole of the country.' I feel that that expense for a small business like that is perhaps unwarranted, especially when it is not in the regulations. There are probably other more important issues but I just raise that.

**Mr RIPOLL**—If a business owner or an employer has got to that stage, they have really moved on. Once they do the national advertising, it is no longer going to be what they are looking for. They have found the person they want, and that is it. The advertising at that stage is just a procedure, and it has no real relevance or bearing on their decision any longer.

**Mr Joyce**—I am sure that is right.

**Mr RIPOLL**—You say that that is correct?

**Mr Joyce**—In many cases that would be true.

**Mr ADAMS**—How much would an employer spend securing someone?

**Mr Joyce**—One figure I know of is \$2,100.

**Mr ADAMS**—What amount of time would one put in?

**Mr Joyce**—On what I said before about a commitment, there is a lot of time. An employer may spend, on and off, a couple of weeks getting all his papers together. He might spend only two solid days, but it would take him a couple of weeks.

**Mr RIPOLL**—In your opinion, if they are looking for someone from overseas, is it often the case that either they already have a person in mind or there is some sort of connection to that person through somebody they know or somebody recommending that person – that is, that they are not just advertising overseas or coming to see you and saying, 'Look, just find me someone in the world'? Is there usually some sort of relationship?

**Mr Joyce**—There is usually some connection, like a business connection. One example that comes to mind is a Queensland manufacturer of componentry who was supplying somebody overseas. One of the people working there said to him, 'I'd like to come to Australia.' He said, 'I can't give you a job, but I'll ask around,' and he asked some of his colleagues. That is the sort of thing that goes on. There might be a family relationship. There might be another member of the family already here.

**Mr RIPOLL**—So it is not necessarily always the case that you cannot find someone local; it just happens that maybe the person they are looking for –

**Mr Joyce**—Maybe that is how they come about, yes. I noticed in previous questioning that the difficulties of finding an employee with relevant experience in a small business can be very real. It can make a huge difference to have a key person who is right – take our pump example. Probably many people would gladly have a job if they knew what to do. They have to have a key person who can tell them what to do in that business. Once you have that key person, you can then build on it with others who do not have those skills. That is commonsense, but it is very real. If you advertise for an airconditioning, refrigeration, mechanic, you will get two or three applications in Adelaide. If you ask for a receptionist, you will get 100 or 200. But if you have the refrigeration mechanic, he provides jobs for others so that you can then employ a receptionist. This is basic stuff.

**Senator BARTLETT**—It sounds like you assist people from many parts of Australia. Does that include capital cities – assisting people to migrate across-the-board?

**Mr Joyce**—No, apart from Adelaide.

**Senator BARTLETT**—So you focus specifically on regional Australia?

**Mr Joyce**—Yes.

**Senator BARTLETT**—How effective are the various schemes at their stated aim of providing an extra incentive for people to move to regional Australia rather than the capital cities?

**Mr Joyce**—If somebody wants to come to Australia, unless they have a relevant degree, diploma or trade and unless they have had sufficient experience, they would not qualify for anything but the RSMS scheme.

That is why we have the exceptional circumstances appointment – for someone who does not have a diploma but who can be very valuable to a company.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I am just wondering about the advantages. Is the fact that there is a two-year contract involved seen to be an advantage to a person from overseas applying for a position such as one we have been talking about? Is it your experience that, in the calling for applications for a position within Australia but also within the region, it has been put to people that a contract could be involved?

**Mr Joyce**—Are you asking whether the advertising includes a reference to that?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Yes.

**Mr Joyce**—No.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—There are a number of constituents of mine back in the west who, with all the restructuring that is going on in business, find themselves over 40 and out of a job; who are finding it very difficult to get another position because they are over the 40 mark. The move to a place like Cunderdin, which is not all that far from Perth, does require shifting all the family and selling the home. If there is no guarantee of ongoing employment, why would they do it? That may be one factor that regional areas might take into consideration when looking for experienced, skilled and very competent people who, just because they are around that 40 mark –

**Mr Joyce**—It is a two-way matter.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Of course it is. The other matter is the definition of regions which we addressed earlier today – that is, the inclusion of Adelaide as a region. Adelaide is a capital city. From your point of view, is it fair to have the inclusion of capital cities within the definition of regions?

**Mr Joyce**—It is a very fair question. I take it back: is it fair that Melbourne –

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I was actually being parochial to you in talking about Adelaide.

**Mr Joyce**—I feel very strongly that the regions need supporting, and if that meant a different level between Adelaide and a regional centre I would agree with it. Adelaide, of course, is not too far removed. When you look at statistics of population flows, Adelaide is not finding it terribly easy right now. I think it is a fair question.

**CHAIR**—If you were running the scheme, would you include Adelaide or Melbourne?

**Mr Joyce**—I would not include Melbourne! I think none of us would include Melbourne!

**CHAIR**—Because we do not have anybody from Victoria here, it does tend to get a bit of a bashing.

**Mr Joyce**—I think it would be fair that there be some scale between Adelaide and a country town like Nhill, Warrnambool or Mount Gambier.

**CHAIR**—How would you operate? How would you make it easier to get them into the smaller towns than into Adelaide? What would be your criteria?

**Mr Joyce**—I do not have the answer. All I can say is that the scheme has been very good for Adelaide. A large number of people have taken it up, and in Adelaide it is not easy to get skilled people. The scheme, as a whole, is a good scheme for Australia. Anything we can do to improve that for the region would be a plus – if I have made myself clear. The old ENS, the Employer Nomination Scheme, is a very restrictive scheme that keeps out a lot of people. The RSMS scheme is good for Australia, and if there was something to be done to assist the regions further I would certainly go along with it.

**CHAIR**—If there are no more questions, Mr Joyce, I thank you for appearing before us today. If we require any more information the secretary will contact you.

[Midday]

**GREYVENSTEIN, Mr Hendrik Lambertus (Bertie), (Private capacity)**

**LAWSON, Ms Stacey Anne, Admin/Project Officer, Greater Green Triangle Region Association**

**CHAIR**—This is not on our original schedule, but Mr Bertie Greyvenstein, who actually has come from South Africa, would like to have a word to the committee about his personal experience. Ms Stacey Lawson has joined him because she is aware of the situation and she can put it in context for us. Would you, first of all, state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

**Ms Lawson**—I am here solely to help Bertie put forward his views today.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make a statement?

**Ms Lawson**—I will explain the situation so you have a fair understanding of what is going on. Bertie has come over under a long-stay temporary visa. He came over as a dependant on his mother who is the main applicant. His mother is over also on a temporary visa. There is a family business that they left behind in South Africa, and they would like to bring that business to Australia. There are five members of the family, Bertie and his mother being two of them. Unfortunately, the other three members could not come over at the same time due to the fact that they did not fit the criteria; they did not get enough points. The other three members would normally be classed as dependants. Are they siblings of yours?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—It would be easier for me to explain it for you. It actually goes along with what Mr Joyce just said. I think he was actually referring to our case when he mentioned the 457 visa of Mount Gambier. What happened is that we as a family applied. We currently have a family business in South Africa. My mother is the sole applicant. I am 24, my older brother is 27, my younger brother is 21 and my sister is 18. We all work as a team.

**CHAIR**—In that business.

**Mr Greyvenstein**—We have all finished our studies. We all have degrees of some sort. But my mother is the only one qualifying as the applicant. For me, being part of that team, coming to Australia, I had to be a dependant. I proved it, which means I have to study in Australia. What we have done now is split the team. It is easy to say yes, but you cannot get someone qualified to do the job in Australia. As Mr Joyce said, that is the key person. That is the structure we have. We are running as a team and from that we operate. I am the accountant; I do the accounting part. My brother is the manager; he does the managing part. Now all of a sudden he is not a dependant any more; he is in South Africa because he does not qualify. It has been drawn out for two or three years. My mother is the applicant; she gets a two-year permanent address. After two years she gets a residence for a time. Then you qualify on points as member families in South Africa. But we feel it is actually a waste of time and a waste of manpower by drawing it out rather than doing the whole package because we see it not as an applicant moving but as the business itself. The business is not the one applicant; it is the team.

**CHAIR**—Just before the committee asks questions, can you give us a clearer idea of your business in South Africa and how you would be moving that business to Australia – not only the personnel but also any finances tied up in that business?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—It is not the business that we want to move. We want to establish a new business in Australia. We want to take our knowledge of business – we are in the retail supermarket business –and implement that in Australia but we cannot do it in a full capacity. So we bought a small business and we have just been able to have two or three persons run that business whereas we could have gone and said, ‘Right, the full team is here. We would rather go and buy a bigger business.’ Our requirements are \$250,000 in assets and three persons fully employed, which is fine. But if we could have moved the complete team, we would have said, ‘All right, now, we can employ 10 or 12 persons and we are a stronger management team.’ Now we are divided and it is not good for us that way.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Mr Greyvenstein, you are married with a family of your own?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—No, sir, I am 25 and am unmarried.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Your elder brother?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes, I have an older brother who is 27. He is married.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—With a family?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—No, he was married in March.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—And your sister is not married?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—No, none of us. He is the only one married and he is the only one at the moment not being a dependant. We are all dependent in the sense that, to be independent, you have to be full time studying. My younger brother has just finished his BCom, which is the baccalaureate of economics and commerce, so he would handle that part of the business for us.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—You are putting forward that the definition of ‘family’ in migration law should be extended to dependants beyond the age of 18, even up to 27 –

**Mr Greyvenstein**—But I would rather not look at – I know it is very difficult because in South Africa we also have a very big problem of immigration from northern Africa down to South Africa, so we understand that is a very thin line. We want you to look at a situation more as a package – like a business, for instance. You have talked about the family. I know the difficulty with the situation that now the grandparents should qualify and the brother that is 35 and his daughter. I know that is very difficult –

**CHAIR**—And that is not what you are looking for?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—No, we are looking at the team moving over.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Within the discrete framework of the business migration program?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Of the business, yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Could you tell me again because it was not clear to me in your evidence: your father was the principal applicant?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes, my father was 21 when he first had the choice to come to Australia when he was in wool production, and at that time South Africans were very conservative and we decided it was too far away. Then four or five years ago – my parents come on holiday quite often to Australia – they decided that they want to be Australians and come to Australia. We did four years of planning and deciding on what we want to do and how we want to do it, and then it was about a week before his application when he got murdered in South Africa. So all of a sudden my mother became the applicant. Everything would have happened a year and a half earlier when most of us would be still normal dependants.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So then your mother became the principal applicant?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—She came in and bought her business here in Australia?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—But the rest of the family were not included within that visa, were they?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes, we are –

**Senator McKIERNAN**—What visas were granted to you at that time?

**Mr Greyvenstein**—It is a 457 visa. It is a four-year long stay business visa. Yes, we are dependants. We are four children: three brothers and one sister.

**Ms Lawson**—They are only dependent on the basis that they are studying full time.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I was wanting the type of visas that they are on. They were on the student visa at that time?

**Ms Lawson**—The main applicant was the mother and then on that visa they came in under her steam as a dependant. But to be classed as a dependant they had to study full time, so that is how they have come in. But the problem is with his sister because it is too expensive for her to study here.

**Mr Greyvenstein**—She is still dependant. While we are wanting to be Australians in the system, we are being told, no, you are South Africans, you have to pay \$8,000 –

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Can I interrupt and caution you here because what you are actually putting on the public record is that you are breaching your visa conditions.

**Mr Greyvenstein**—No, sir, I am full time studying; I can prove it.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I just caution you.

**Mr Greyvenstein**—I know it is a very thin line but it is something that needs to be said. I think it should be for the betterment of Australia, putting it that way.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I am reluctant to ask any more questions. I just think that you are on difficult and dangerous grounds. I am more than happy to leave it there and perhaps talk to you outside.

**CHAIR**—If I can summarise: what you are suggesting is that there should be a category where we should be looking at a family which is already engaged in an enterprise in another country and which, as a family group, would re-do that enterprise in this country and each member of that family group contributes. We are talking about people who are still young in the work force. So we are not talking about grandfathers, grandmothers and all that sort of thing but a viable family unit. You are suggesting that there should an extra category of business migration to fill that need.

**Mr Greyvenstein**—Yes, madam chair, exactly.

**CHAIR**—I thank you very much for your evidence today and I appreciate your coming before us to tell you what you believe. I also thank you, Ms Lawson. We will get back to you if we have any further questions. We are now breaking for lunch. Perhaps you would like to stay and the deputy chair could talk to you in private because he has concerns and he would rather not have some of that conversation on the public record. I thank everybody who attended this morning.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.12 p.m. to 1.47 p.m.**

**BARBER, Mr William (Private capacity)**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require witnesses to take an oath you should understand that these are the proceedings of parliament and any false evidence is regarded as a contempt of parliament.

**Mr Barber**—I understand.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make an opening statement, Mr Barber?

**Mr Barber**—Thank you very much for the opportunity to attend this committee. I think it is the 16th that I have given evidence to so I feel relatively comfortable. As a matter of interest, I am giving evidence because part of it comes up in the publication of *Jobs for the regions* which was the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee publication. I was resident in Queensland at the time. I guess my concern primarily, as someone living in a remote region – by way of Victoria being remote anyway – is that we are obviously trying to bring business into the region and we need, where possible, to ensure that whatever actions are taken to try to bring people here are as easy and as comfortable as possible.

In my submission you may note that I mentioned Mr Al and Mrs Paula Basso and Mr Jorge de Moya. It is interesting that Mr de Moya has just received a four-year visa but that Mr and Mrs Basso, who have spent some \$2.2 million on this olive situation, have been informed that they will receive a visa but that they will now have to go offshore somewhere to pick it up and come back. I honestly feel that is a bit like slapping someone on the wrist for wanting to come here, particularly when those sorts of dollars and cents are being put into what will be the largest agricultural business in the West Wimmera region.

**CHAIR**—Mr Barber, just to make it easier for the committee, I suggest that rather than refer to people by name just say that there is an example of some people because we might want to ask you details but we would rather not know the names. Sometimes we find out more than we want to know about a particular person. Do you understand our problem?

**Mr Barber**—Yes, I quite understand.

**CHAIR**—You could just say that ‘there is this family’ and then we can feel comfortable about asking questions without identifying them.

**Mr Barber**—My apologies. They were listed in my submission and permission was given to mention them, but I take your point. One of the main concerns I have is that the Foreign Investment Review Board tends to do a very good job, obviously, in trying to find people or in discussing opportunities. Then you find, having said that, you have a problem with Immigration. There seems to be some sort of problem with the conduit between the two organisations. My other concern is that it appears that when people are over 45 – and bear in mind that is when a lot of people have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and, indeed, capital – that there is also a problem of people being able to come into Australia to start their businesses. In an agricultural based situation, the area I am in at present, it is very important that we try to have add-on value or downstream marketing to the traditional growth of grain and, I guess, wool but also to bring new products to the region, maybe Asian vegetables or other types of products. Obviously we need to bring in people from overseas to actually undertake such building up of resources in our regions.

In the area where I presently live, the West Wimmera region, we are losing 1.5 per cent per annum of our population. That may not sound much but when you think that 1.5 per cent ends up being 15 per cent per decade it is very serious. So obviously I am very interested in seeing the possibility of regional migration to bring people into Australia, particularly if we can get them into regions such as ours and add value to the economy of particularly small rural and regional areas. The towns in the region where I live have populations of fewer than a thousand people.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I want to follow up on the two examples you give in your submission. Prior to both parties receiving the four-year business visas, what visas were they on?



**Mr Barber**—I understand that they were on year-to-year visas so that they were being renewed on a year-to-year basis. The second party, lady and gentleman, had only recently arrived in the country as the second people to be involved. The other gentleman had been in over the last couple of years.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—The second party is the party with the Spanish horses. Am I right in that?

**Mr Barber**—That is right. They also have the Spanish horses as well, yes.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Are there any family links between those people?

**Mr Barber**—No. I guess the gentleman who is primarily involved in putting the whole operation together for the olive plantation was looking for people, and is still looking for people, who can assist to actually build up the business. We are talking about 1,200-odd acres, as you probably gather. Some of that expertise, of course, has to come from offshore and obviously would be then used to train local people as well.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—It seems a bit of the haphazard way of going about developing an industry, if you like, on a temporary visa on a year-to-year basis with obviously a substantial capital investment going into it. How long has this been going on, and was there at the beginning a will to reside permanently in Australia?

**Mr Barber**—Yes, there was a will. The gentleman is well over 45 years of age. The problem I think really came about where the Foreign Investment Review Board, on my understanding, indicated that what he was trying to do was a good idea, and obviously he started down the track on the assumption that, because they agreed that the olive plantation was a good idea, obviously there would be no problem with obtaining the appropriate visa, given also that \$1.2 million – I think now over \$2 million – has been invested. The problem is the conduit between the two departments. When he received basically the imprimatur of the first, he assumed that that would flow on to the second. It was probably a wrong assumption, but I think that is where it came from.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—It probably is, because there is a lot of foreign investment that occurs that does not necessarily attract a residency or an immigration status with us. Was there a pull factor from Australia that attracted the individual gentleman to Australia, or was it his own initiative in searching the world for somewhere to invest and establish?

**Mr Barber**—Basically it was the latter. He indicated to me that he found some land that would grow olives. He had also spent a considerable amount of time offshore, in Spain and in Italy, researching olives and the best type of olives to grow. He also appreciated that we do have an opportunity not only domestically but also to export olives. As I am sure you would be aware, that does not happen until at least four years after the first planting and probably closer to six before you take any crop off the olive grove.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I was not aware of that. You learn something at these hearings.

**Mr Barber**—I have done so too, Senator.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Thank you for that, that you are learning. With the four-year business visa, there is no automatic guarantee that there is going to be permanent residency at the expiry of that term.

**Mr Barber**—My understanding is that you are correct. I understand that, if I could use the word, convention tends to be that if the business is up and established and running well and obviously the people are not seem to be a drain on our economy and our services, then, all things being equal, whatever that means, they would then receive a much longer extended visa, if not a residency visa.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—The second family – we will not mention the name – who are connected with the Spanish horses came in following the first family. Were they friends or related?

**Mr Barber**—No. Apparently he met them through what I call a business situation, and also the gentleman has experience in olive growing as well. The first gentleman would live many thousands of kilometres away. But he found them by one means or another, from what I can understand. But there is no family relationship at all. And the first gentleman is on his own, incidentally. He is a man of senior years. He does not have a family here.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Senior years?

**Mr Barber**—Close to 70; in his sixties.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—How many jobs have been created by the ventures of both families, that you are aware of?

**Mr Barber**—At the moment they are starting to plant, and they have got something like 110 acres already under construction and another 110 about to go, but obviously with very small trees. It is not until they grow that they will need to be pruned, and there would be a requirement for people for that type of work. The gentleman also wants to build a bed and breakfast up there, and he is also looking at the possibility of having a small township. We are talking about a place called Telopea Downs, which is about 45 kilometres north of Kaniva. There is absolutely nothing up there at all apart from farming and grazing country, and of course the big desert is above that. He sees an opportunity to eventually build up a small township there, and that is the type of employment that would be foreseen, particularly as we get up towards three and four years, because trees will need to be pruned and eventually olives will need to be harvested as well.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Did your council have direct involvement with either of the two people establishing themselves in the region? Did you act in a sponsorship role?

**Mr Barber**—No, because they did not need the funding, but I actually found the people. I started as manager of business development in the West Wimmera Shire in August 1998, and they were looking around at that stage. I was desperate to look for any business I could find – particularly any add-on business or opportunities where farming products would be forthcoming. The area I am in is not an industrial area. We do not even have a traffic light or an ATM, or poker machines.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—We do not have poker machines in Perth either.

**CHAIR**—Is it the 70-year-old who has invested the \$1.2 million?

**Mr Barber**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—What efforts has he gone to to get permanent residency status? Are you aware of what he has tried to do?

**Mr Barber**—Yes, he has been involved with – I will not mention the name, I guess you would prefer me not to – a company which is involved in Australian visa and migration services.

**CHAIR**—So he has been through a migration agent and he has been rejected. Do you know if he has argued his case in front of a tribunal or not?

**Mr Barber**—No, I am afraid I do not. What I do know is that he was having problems, as he saw it, obtaining the number of points. Our shire was able to assist because he is already established there, and I also brought this to the notice of the local area consultancy for the Green Triangle organisation, of which I am also a member. They were aware of the work he was doing up there and we were able to support him in that vein. I became aware when he realised he had really serious problems. As mentioned earlier, I think the problem between the two organisations is where the confusion came in.

**CHAIR**—This is probably not pertinent, but how long has he been here now?

**Mr Barber**—He has been here for over two years.

**CHAIR**—So we had a gentleman of 68 looking around the world, without family, suddenly settling in Australia.

**Mr Barber**—Yes. The gentleman is involved in a number of businesses in the United States which obviously have funded the organisation. He goes back for about two months a year to attend annual general meetings and to have involvement. His family has grown up.

**CHAIR**—So he does have a family?

**Mr Barber**—He has a family, but they run corporations for him in the United States.

**CHAIR**—I see. Why would he want residency here?

**Mr Barber**—He sees the opportunity to provide a major contribution in our area, but he also sees olives as an important part, and he enjoys working on the land. We are talking about leading edge technology that he has. All of his irrigation is hooked up to computers - drip systems and the latest and greatest in that area. As he

said, if you don't run your business that way, in the end you are not going to be able to compete in the marketplace offshore. Also, he has an open door policy, and this is probably very important. Because he appreciates the opportunity to be able work and live here, anybody can come and have a look at his operation. He has an open door policy so that if other olive farmers want to change their practices he is more than happy for them to come and visit any time.

**Mr ADAMS**—The olive oil industry is very big around New York. I do not know if this guy comes out of that end of the world and, before that, Sicily. I guess he probably does not come from that side of America. I was interested in the local government's support. Does the local government support regional migration?

**Mr Barber**—Yes, Mr Adams. We are in a situation where we support any business that we can bring to the shire. We have the second largest shire in area in Victoria, but we also have the second smallest population outside of a very small shire in metropolitan Melbourne. My concern, as I mentioned earlier, is to stop the drift from our own area and obviously of anyone prepared to come to our part of Victoria and make a major or even minor contribution—to me, a major contribution could employ six people. I have a very big concern about the future of some of the smaller villages, let alone the two major towns in our shire. If someone leaves, it can even close a small school or something like that. We have had those sorts of situations over the last 12 months, so we welcome anyone who is prepared to come into our area and value add to what is already there or to make any other contribution to the region. As far as I am concerned, that is why I am employed.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—What is your population?

**Mr Barber**—The population of the whole shire is 5,200 people in 10,000-odd square kilometres. We run up and down the border from just here.

**CHAIR**—So he is more sparsely populated than you are.

**Mr Barber**—Yes, we are. We are trying to steal some of their people.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—What is your population drift? Where are the people going when they are leaving?

**Mr Barber**—I guess the major problem would be with the teenage population. There seems to be a brick wall drop once people leave school because we do not have TAFE and other places of learning. It levels out and then at about 35 it starts to slowly come up again. The main reason for it being about 35 is that they are taking over the farms of the families of the older people. We find in our western area of Victoria that most of the populations are dropping. However, in places like Horsham, which is a regional centre, the populations are actually increasing. Some people are moving to what I would call a major regional area of, say, 15,000-20,000 population.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—In the context that this committee is examining of the regional sponsored migration mechanisms, do you think it is fair that Melbourne ought to be included in Victoria as a region and receive whatever advantages the definition of 'region' will give?

**Mr Barber**—To my way of thinking, anybody that comes from anywhere to our area, including Geelong, or Melbourne, or wherever, is probably regional migration from a viewpoint of people coming into the region. I have spent some time in Asia working in that area. I see possibilities of people coming out here to market domestic products from our regions by bringing people in, whether from within the Commonwealth or outside, and then, later on hopefully turning that to a possibility where they can re-export overseas as well. That is when we get to a win-win situation.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Within the various schemes that are operating migration mechanisms for attracting people from overseas to settle in regional Australia, Melbourne and other capital cities are included as regions. It would seem to me it is a lot easier to attract a person from overseas to settle in Melbourne than in the towns like Edenhope, because of the lack of variety of infrastructure which is available in a capital like Melbourne, the second city in Australia, and Edenhope where you live and your council is based.

**Mr Barber**—That is right.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—It is within that context I ask the question about the including of Melbourne and other capital cities within the regional definitions.

**Mr Barber**—I think if you are attracting large organisations to Australia, particularly if they begin running branches throughout the Commonwealth—

**Senator McKIERNAN**—With due respect, you will not be attracting large organisations through these specific schemes. That is not what the schemes are about. It is not a matter of chasing investment as such; it is really opening doors for migration rather than capital investment as such.

**Mr Barber**—What I was alluding to there in relation to the larger communities is that there are occasions where migration schemes can allow other branches or outlets once something is established. But, as far as our own areas are concerned, what I would like to see the government do is spend more time looking at the types of industry and the types of businesses that could be established in regional areas – and a regional area can be anywhere outside a capital city as far as I am concerned – with a view to adding value in those areas. I guess the value adding in an area of a capital city by way of regional migration is very minor but someone coming in and starting up a business that might employ six or 10 people in our area is big stuff as far as I am concerned.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—One of the concessions is the age limit and generally the age limit of 45 applies. Should Melbourne, Adelaide or Hobart receive the same concessional treatment for a migrant, a person with business skills that are in need, as Edenhope, where your council is based?

**Mr Barber**—I think the only criterion that could be possibly used would be to say, 'Is the particular product or industry that they may be involved in going to make an added contribution to that capital city or that larger region?' If it does not, I guess the rules would probably then have to be a little different, but in my case any business is better than none.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Okay, I will rest my case for now.

**Senator BARTLETT**—I have a few questions in relation to the economic aspects of the shire in general, given your job is business development in the shire. Do you actually have a problem of jobs being available and not being able to fill them?

**Mr Barber**—Not in our area. Do you mean from an unemployment situation?

**Senator BARTLETT**—Yes.

**Mr Barber**—We do not tend to have a problem primarily because we export that problem to Horsham, Ballarat or Melbourne. I am thinking particularly of younger people in that area. Yes, it is probably a slightly larger problem in the over-45 or over-55 age group mainly because, for argument's sake, the largest employer in our western region is the shire and then you start to get down to 10 or 12 small supermarkets and maybe a major transport company and then we get down to 10s and below.

We have no large industry in our area, so again the specialising of people who come in relation to regional migration would have to probably be operating small businesses or specialised small businesses which may also include adding value. For argument's sake, we have the viticulture across the border, so people that may be able to work stainless steel or work in the specialised fabricating of products or equipment or in specialised welding or have techniques available in relation to the growing of a particular crop or product. That would also particularly include Asian vegetables. That would be one area where I believe there would be an opportunity to have people come in. We are working very much in the smaller area. When I was in Gladstone in Central Queensland it was different; it was a different type of problem.

**Senator BARTLETT**—Is there much of a requirement for seasonal work?

**Mr Barber**—Not yet, mainly because we have just started the viticulture business on what I call the Victorian side of the border. It is very small in relation to South Australia, but a number of our people do cross the border and work in South Australia in abattoirs and also in assisting with pruning and maintaining vines in South Australia. To me that is good because as our industry grows we are going to have those people to be able to draw on to work on our side of the border. That brings me to another concern, and that is the fact that it is expertise that we need in regional migration, particularly in our area, rather than the dollars and cents. If we

could find the people, I think we could probably find people to invest in our region or we could bring people from outside our region in to invest if we had the expertise available to undertake small to medium businesses.

**Senator BARTLETT**—That is not so much in a sense of a vacant job with a particular expertise you cannot find anyone to fill, but just in a general sense if you have those people being economically active.

**Mr Barber**—That is right.

**CHAIR**—I gather that your situation is different from some of the other areas, in that you are not looking for skills. You need the businesses to come in and be established before you find you have a lack of skills. Right now it is the lack of businesses that is affecting your area.

**Mr Barber**—That is right. The businesses and the expertise to run those businesses.

**CHAIR**—It is money and expertise you need.

**Mr Barber**—That is right. But expertise first and money second, because quite often you can find investment. Part of my responsibility would be to go and find that investment and dollars.

**CHAIR**—Are there opportunities for people? I guess there are the examples you have already given us. I just say to the committee now that the 70 year old you did mention will be sending us a submission. Unfortunately, he could not appear before us.

So you think there are opportunities out there, but somehow we have to make people aware that there are opportunities there not only, I suspect, to the migrants but also to people in Australia. Do you think that is fair enough, or do you think there are not people in Australia with the expertise to recognise the opportunities?

**Mr Barber**—I think the problem at the moment is that people in regional areas, in business, probably have major problems even more so than maybe in the larger regional areas. What I am trying to do is stem the flow of the people leaving the region. That means finding work for the people who are there. Maybe that means bringing in people from outside or overseas who have expertise so we can keep people, or alternatively it is bringing people in who can eventually train the local people as well to undertake those specialised positions. I guess that is probably the answer to our problem. If I can solve that one, I am sure I will get more than a raise.

**CHAIR**—Probably.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—On the economic front, you are not too enamoured of the Treasurer's comments about wages in regional areas. You made some mention of that. I am not being party political on this, but would it be more damaging to the objects of state-specific migration mechanisms if there were salary and wage differentials between the rural areas – I say rural areas, as distinct from regional areas – and metropolitan cities? The majority of the migrants who come to Australia go to the capital cities, mainly Sydney then Melbourne and then it is split between the other capitals. Could it be damaging to the aims of state-specific migration mechanisms under various schemes that come within that umbrella if there were great differentials in wages and salaries?

**Mr Barber**—I think, unfortunately, we are in that situation now. In my shire, for argument's sake, there are many farms that would be lucky to turn over \$30,000 a year. On many of the farms I am on now, either the farmer or the farmer's wife is now working in schools, department stores or wherever they can find a dollar so they can keep body and soul together. This is why I am trying to value add, downstream market or whatever buzz words we want to use – so we can keep these people who are there viable. Some of that is going to be to bring expertise from overseas, particularly products that may be grown in our region which in turn can be exported overseas.

I think you will find, as I am sure you would appreciate – again, I am being non-party – there was a tremendous amount of upheaval when those comments were made in regional areas. Indeed, I know my own shire were moved to write to the Treasurer in relation to that matter. They were concerned that we were seen to be almost a Third World country if we were to take the idea of lower wages in a region where you also have higher imposts – whether it is fuel, food costs, transport or whatever. Again, people choose to live in that area – myself included – and part of living in that area is to pay those imposts but not to be further dragged down with more financial restraints by way of lower wages and salaries.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—As a follow-up to a question I asked of an earlier set of witnesses about gaining people with expertise that are required in regional areas, do you have any experience of targeting those people who have been made unemployed through corporate takeovers or restructuring? There are a number of people who are at the over-40 mark who find themselves virtually on the scrap heap and wandering around looking for something to do. If they knew there were opportunities available in regional Australia with some guarantees, they might be prepared to settle. Has your organisation ever sort to target that body of people who are in our community? They may not be organised but they are certainly there.

**Mr Barber**—Yes, I have personally been involved in as much as I have been a New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, or NEIS, manager in southern New South Wales and Queensland, and I have also had a bit of involvement with it here. I appreciate that that is an internal type of system. I really believe there may be opportunities to use some of the parameters in NEIS, particularly where we need people – rather than just doing it per se – to fill what I call industrial or commercial gaps in the system. It is an excellent scheme, as I am sure you would be aware. I know that the former Commonwealth government was involved and, indeed, the present Commonwealth government continues to be involved in it. I think that the scheme is probably one of the greatest things that has happened. One of the three or four major businesses here – they are major in our town but they are small beer elsewhere – is the Swanbank Joinery. It was visited by the Hon. John Brumby this morning, and its owner was a NEIS person. He now employs six people. It does work. If the benefits within that type of system could be seen, then they could possibly be used for regional migration.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Barber, for appearing before the committee today. We do appreciate the time you have spent with us.

**Mr Barber**—I do appreciate the opportunity to come and speak with you. Thank you very much.

**Proceedings suspended from 2.18 p.m. to 2.32 p.m.**

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**McALOON, Mr Patrick Francis, Executive Officer, Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee****POLLOCK, Mrs Elaine, Executive Officer, South East Area Consultative Committee**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require witnesses to take an oath, these are the proceedings of the parliament of Australia and any efforts to mislead the committee would be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Would you like to make a statement? I have a submission before me from Mrs Pollock. Would you like to make a statement to go with that?

**Mrs Pollock**—Yes. Thanks for allowing me to come and make a presentation before the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. The proposal that we provided to you was to give you a snapshot of the issues in relation to the labour market within the south-east of South Australia. We actually have evidence that identifies those particular issues that we have because we undertook a major audit across the Greater Green Triangle region to identify the skill shortages and virtually a labour market review and business information as well.

The basis of that evidence has actually supported a range of initiatives that have been introduced following that initial audit. What has clearly happened for us – and I will take it back to in terms of migration – is that, with the significant low unemployment that we have and problems with accommodation and transport, business in this region is being constrained quite significantly by the lack of available labour. The business migration program is one way that we could look at making use of the government program to get skilled workers within our area. This ACC has actually worked with the federal immigration department and the state immigration department to look at how we can promote that better within our region to enable business to consider that as an option, particularly with those vacancies that are hard to fill. I will not talk about what the ACC is about. I assume you all know what the ACC is about, and the information that I am leaving with you today provides additional information if you want it.

I would like to talk about what I believe are some recommendations that might be used to actually further promote the migration program within regional and rural areas, probably because of the experience that we have had working with the state and federal people and knowing that, at the grassroots level, that information is actually translated into people coming into our area through the migration program. I think you have a sheet there that indicates initiatives that this ACC has implemented to assist the process.

We hold meetings every two months throughout the region. Following our meetings, we hold business dinners where we invite the local business community to come along and talk about local community issues. Usually at those presentations we have guest speakers who are invited to come along and talk about a range of issues. We usually ask the local community that we go to what the main issues are that they would like somebody to come and talk about. Through those forums we have actually had people like John Heren and John Tonkin from the migration area come to address the business community and, like I said, that is translated into people taking opportunities up through the migration program.

Following that, we have actually identified where specific skill shortages exist across industry. We have a targeted promotional campaign from both Johns and we have sent those out to those businesses to actually target the program more. So we have used our network and our local knowledge to do that.

If somebody calls into their office and is looking for employment, John might actually ring me and say, ‘Elaine, do you know of any employers that I might be able to contact? I have somebody in the south-east who is interested.’ So we do that. Of course, whenever we arrange special meetings, we always have a press release and a follow-up media contact. We are always happy to promote additional programs, and we have made use of that at times. We sometimes do regular employment features and I might invite them to advertise.

I have actually included a couple of examples of postcards that I will look at doing over the next 12 months. These will be targeted to businesses. About 3,000 businesses throughout the south-east will have them put in their mail. All I wanted to do each month was to promote some program or initiative that the ACC is involved in. If you notice the January one, it talks about our Seasonal Jobs Calendar. That is why I was late today – I was at a launch of the Seasonal Jobs Calendar. Next month there will be a launch for another initiative. I have

spoken with the immigration department to maybe use that medium as an opportunity to promote the regional migration program. So we are having some discussions about that. That is something we could look at doing. I have also made sure that, anytime there are programs of assistance to business, it is always critical that the Job Network know about those sorts of initiatives. Any promotion always includes the Job Network and the employment services industry. So these are the sorts of initiatives of the ACC.

I have indicated some recommendations of how you might promote that better within the regional areas. Not enough effort is put into the regional areas to promote the program, and I think probably more focus within the regional areas could be useful. You have a network of area consultative committees throughout Australia that I think you could utilise a bit more in the dissemination of information. ACCs are there within the regions virtually looking at local solutions to employment, education and training issues. So use your ACC network more. It is also about building relationships. The fact that John Heren will ring me if he has somebody means that we have been able to forge a relationship through that. In regard to business applications, I was approached through the SE Employers Chamber to put some information together for their *Business SA* edition. It is a good magazine. It comes out each month through the employers chamber. Unfortunately, regional information does not always get in there, but it is a good vehicle. We always leaf through it and read stories of note.

Also, I think we have made sure that we have created links and continually feed information through to the peak industry bodies. Certainly we work very closely with the industry training advisory boards and feed information of our labour market through to them, because they are the ones that are developing the state training plans and they are the ones that are attracting the federal funding in terms of training dollars to skill up our labour force and those sorts of things. Those industry training advisory boards are a vehicle of feeding information back to their members. Of course, the last one is to relax the medical rules. An issue for us, of course, is the accommodation, but sometimes it is not only accommodation you need to attract families into your area but also the need to have the additional infrastructure. The medical problems which are happening right throughout Australia are no different within the south-east. We have to make sure that we get it right. Everywhere I go they talk about the difficulty of getting medical staff in regional areas and they talk about the difficulties with the AMA in terms of, 'Can't they do something for regional Australia? We're hurting.' That is probably all I would like to say at this time.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mrs Pollock. Before I go on, the committee has no objection in accepting the information you gave us as an exhibit. You described a problem for regional Australia and it is a large problem. How do you see the regional migration program as going to solve that? It is certainly not going to solve your whole problem, but how do you see it fitting in? Is it a large section of what you see or just a very minor add-on at the end?

**Mrs Pollock**—It is a program that adds to existing programs that are available. It is certainly not going to solve our problems, but it does provide another opportunity that employers can tap into. But I think a lot of them are not tapping into it at the moment.

**CHAIR**—So you see a whole range of things that you as a region can do and this is simply one of them and you do not believe it is being used to its maximum potential?

**Mrs Pollock**—I do not believe it is being promoted to its maximum potential.

**CHAIR**—We have heard from you today that it has not been utilised. Let us say it is advertised more, more people become aware of it and it is utilised. When they get here, do they then not face the problems that you have alluded to of no accommodation and limited medical care?

**Mrs Pollock**—But they are problems that we as a community will need to solve.

**CHAIR**—If you are getting people out here on a regional migration program, you are going to have to have somewhere to accommodate them before they get here, not after they arrive.

**Mrs Pollock**—There is a logical progression in a lot of these things. I will just give you the example of the Seasonal Jobs Calendar. We did the market research and then produced the calendar. We now know what the windows of opportunity are across the harvest industries. From there, we need to look at whether or not we can



aggregate these jobs into some sustainable jobs. If we are able to do that, we have possibly got people that are living in rental accommodation now that through financial institutions may be in a position to buy a house rather than rent. That might free up some rental accommodation. I lost my train of thought then.

**CHAIR**—I probably distracted you by looking at your regional job calendar.

**Mrs Pollock**—What I was saying is that that was one step in a process. We can look at the aggregation of jobs. If we have not got available labour to take up those jobs, the issue of accommodation is critical for us.

**Mr ADAMS**—Is it that they may come for one season, say three months work, and then they go and you lose that skill?

**Mrs Pollock**—Yes. We have got jobs available over probably a 10-month period here that we do not need people to come in for, that we have got our local people for. If our local people still do not meet the demand, then there are opportunities for us to look at packages to attract people into our area. But if we do not have things like the accommodation issue sorted out we are wasting our time. It is critical that the region actually gets together in a united approach to our key issue of accommodation. What we need to do is to come up with a solution for that. That is what this region is looking at doing at the moment.

**Senator BARTLETT**—My question is probably slightly broader than just the migration programs we are looking at, but I would find it helpful to get a broader picture of some of the labour issues. Do you see it as part of the answer for the seasonal work? It probably would not apply under this program. I was talking to someone over lunch locally – I do not know how accurate this is – about the meatworks up in Naracoorte. The skills are in the region but people cannot get there because of transport and other problems. They are bringing in people from New Zealand to ensure they have got enough workers. Is it a widespread problem that, even if you have skills in the region, they cannot get to the jobs in the broader area?

**Mrs Pollock**—The meat industry is a bit different. We do not have people with the skills to take up the opportunities that are available in the meat industry, so they are importing labour from New Zealand at the moment for the opportunities up at Naracoorte. But what is happening at Naracoorte as well is that you have got people going to Naracoorte who are not happy with the work conditions and are leaving there and going up to the other abattoir, which is up at Tatiara in Bordertown. Transport is an issue. In one area here we have got Millicent, 50 kilometres away, where they have got an excess of Housing Trust accommodation. We have got development happening within a 60-kilometre radius of Millicent, and opportunities for employment, but Millicent does not have public transport.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Can I follow up on your meatworks example, on the question put by the senator. I actually have in my electorate Australia's largest meatworks, and they virtually do not import any outside labour; it is all local people. There are currently about 1,500 workers and they are aiming towards 2½ thousand within the next 12 months. They have got their own training program – it is a six-week program – and they get funding from the state and from the federal government. They find it much more efficient, much more economical, than importing people. They have got their crew, though it certainly takes a time to get there; but once they have got their crew they actually train their own people. Is that an issue? You cannot just be consistently trying to import; you have to at some stage decide, 'This is an ongoing concern, we need to have our own systems; we need to train our own people,' and, hopefully, provide long-term jobs, particularly in regional areas. Do you have any comments about that?

**Mrs Pollock**—Certainly, in terms of that, there is Teys Brothers at Naracoorte. South-East Meats is an export abattoir and they have had a history of opening and closing, and coming under different ownership. Teys Brothers is a company from Queensland that have bought and have come to Naracoorte. Teys Brothers have a philosophy of improving their operations, and one of the ways is to have good, trained staff. What they have done is that they have actually exhausted the labour within the Naracoorte area. Naracoorte has an unemployment rate of about two per cent. There is nobody within the Naracoorte area that meets the needs of their industry.

There is an employment agency that they were using in Queensland that set up an office in Naracoorte to try and come up with solutions. This company's solution is to look at imported labour. Yes, it is criminal, but the

problem is that Naracoorte is an hour away from here, it does not have accommodation, so people need to travel an hour to go to a job. It might be okay to travel two hours on a train in a capital city, but when you get into a regional centre if you have to travel more than 10 minutes it is too far way, so there is a great reluctance by people to travel from Mount Gambier through to Naracoorte on a daily basis.

**Senator BARTLETT**—If there is a lack of accommodation and other infrastructure in that area it would be a problem whether it is meatworkers or whatever. That would be a problem even if you were using this program to bring out individual people to fill skilled vacancies.

**Mrs Pollock**—The issue of accommodation is a regional issue but, unfortunately, any development in terms of finding solutions for accommodation is happening at the local government level, so there is a lot of duplication going on at the local government level, a lot of lobbying of state and federal people to come and say, 'Hey, we have got a problem here,' rather than us looking at it as a regional issue, because it is. Originally, Tatiara and Naracoorte were the two areas of critical accommodation, but we are finding right across the south-east now, even up to Kingston where significant development is happening within the viticulture industry, that accommodation is also a problem there, so you have got local government trying to find local solutions to a problem.

Just recently, Tatiara, through negotiations with the state government, have been given a \$1.2 million loan to look at the provision of 20 homes to be integrated within the Bordertown area. It is hoped that they would then be able to bring people in. For them, the solution was: we build the houses and people will come. But the issue is not only that; the issue is you have got to bring the people in that meet the needs of business, so you have to also look at it from a holistic point of view. You have to consider what are the employment and training demands of your area so that the people you are bringing in are going to join your community and add value to your local business.

**Senator BARTLETT**—One of your recommendations specific to this program on the sheet you have just given us is to relax medical rules. Can you give us examples of where you feel that has been an unreasonable hurdle?

**Mrs Pollock**—I have not gone into a great deal of detail. Getting medical staff within the Tatiara area is a real problem for them – and it is not just Tatiara, I might say, but even Mount Gambier.

**Senator BARTLETT**—You are talking about medical practitioners. I read that and thought that the health criteria for migrants to come in was what that was relating to, but you are talking about employment in the medical field.

**Mrs Pollock**—Yes, virtually right across the whole medical area. There is criticism. I do not know enough about it, but they were talking about the limits that the AMA put on for people to come into regional areas. A two-year period is really not enough. People after a two-year period become part of the community, and there are opportunities for them to stay with their local community but, because of the limits that are currently there, there is not an interest in them coming into the area and no incentive for them to stay. So there is continual turnover of staff and, in fact, great difficulty in even getting them to come to those areas.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Do you believe your region should compete on an equal basis with a place like Adelaide, for example?

**Mrs Pollock**—It is not a level playing field. We do not have the population that Adelaide has. Our population is 62,000. We have 21,000 square kilometres within the south-east. It is not a level playing field, just because of population.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Do you believe there should be more concessions available to areas such as the one you come from than would be available to Adelaide as a major metropolitan area in Australia?

**Mrs Pollock**—I am not sure about concessions. It is interesting. I think we would be looking at access to expertise and access to effective planning – assistance when you come up with a local community solution but you lack the resources to implement it.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I am thinking more in the area of additional points being allocated if a region is declared to be a region and there is sponsorship available, like in the Regional Established Business in Australia, where an additional 15 points is available if the state or territory does the sponsorship. Do you think that should be equally available to a place like Adelaide or Melbourne as it is to Mount Gambier and other areas in between?

**Mrs Pollock**—I do not know enough to make a really informed comment on that. The regions do have a disadvantage. If the fact is that you overcome a disadvantage by making additional concessions, that may be a possible way of going.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—If it were a level playing field, do you think a person, family, company or enterprise would be more eager to go into a major, established city like Melbourne, with all the infrastructure and all the advantages – and disadvantages – that go with a major city, than to a place like Mount Gambier?

**Mrs Pollock**—There are a lot of issues in that, aren't there? There are the lifestyle choices that people make, the cost of running a business and all the sorts of things that would weigh up in terms of a business wanting to invest. Sometimes also regions could be promoting ourselves a bit more to business to attract business investment, to grow population and then to grow infrastructure as well. It is not that we do not have the expertise but how we sell ourselves.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So if you are a region on the same funding as, for example, Melbourne, how are you ever going to be able to compete, never mind competing with your own capital city of Adelaide?

**Mrs Pollock**—Well, we cannot compete, can we?

**Senator McKIERNAN**—So should there be some concessions, then, or additional bonus points or something, to go to more remote areas?

**Mrs Pollock**—Possibly.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Regarding your regional survey, which you identified in your submission, and the number of positions that are vacant, do you see those positions being filled from overseas, or is it just a recognition of what positions are available?

**Mrs Pollock**—Certainly it is interesting. Out of that we uncovered about 600 trade jobs that were going begging, equating to around \$30 million a year investment not happening in our area. Business will do without. They will advertise. If they are not successful, they will then look at pirating. You will see one company advertise in the papers for a diesel mechanic and you can bet that in another month another company will advertise for a diesel mechanic, and it is a continual process that happens. So you have got that. You have got business that will not develop further because they have not got the staff to develop themselves further.

I will give you an example. Here in Penola, we had a local grower who had 80 acres that he wanted to put under broccoli. He could not get the labour to plant the broccoli, so 80 acres did not go under. For him, that was a significant loss in production potential, just because he could not get the labour that he needed. Those sorts of things are happening.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—You also mentioned the New Zealanders coming in for meatworkers jobs and also in the forestry industry. What happens? Do they just come in on a seasonal basis and move on when the season ends?

**Mrs Pollock**—Yes. In terms of the blue gums, the blue gums within this area are significant. Investment capital is planting blue gums. It is expected that they are going to double what the plantings are currently. So up to 36,000 hectares may be planted next year. The labour need for that is about 1,000. A thousand may be needed over a two-month period. A major company is looking at bringing in people to do that.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—You would not be looking at the state and regional sponsored migration programs, as such, to fill those positions, would you?

**Mrs Pollock**—No.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—I am desperately thinking of a question to ask of Mr McAloon. He is the quietest McAloon I have ever come across.

**Mrs Pollock**—Pat and I work very closely together. The business information and labour force survey was a joint initiative across two ACCs. We have done a range of initiatives together. Pat was over here today for our seasonal jobs calendar launch, and I said, 'Pat, come along with me,' because, if additional information is asked for about the labour market across in the south-west of Victoria, Pat is the expert. I am the expert in the south-east.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps Pat would like to oblige you, Senator – certainly after that invitation.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—McAloons come from Cavan, as well.

**Mr McAloon**—That is right. As I said, Elaine has prepared a paper. On the Victorian side, we do not have the problem of the labour shortages such as here but, in the skills audit we did, we found the main problem was tradespersons. What happens is that, if you cannot fill those trade jobs in a place like Portland, some of the contract work actually gets done by crews that come in from Melbourne. There are a lot of issues there: over the period of time, not enough apprentices being trained, and so on.

I suppose the only other comment I would like to make is that, from the Area Consultative Committee's point of view, there are 58 committees across Australia and we see ourselves as perhaps the voice of the federal government now and something that we can probably do through our brief is promote a lot of the work of the migration committee.

**Mr ADAMS**—This is a little bit broader than migration. What is happening here, in relation to the vocational education training through TAFE colleges, to meet the skills need?

**Mrs Pollock**—Certainly the information from our skills audit was significant. It identified about 3,000 different individual training course requests and almost 2,000 job opportunities that were happening over a two-year period. Both TAFEs – the South West Institute of TAFE and the South East Institute of TAFE – were among the significant financial contributors to that survey. They paid for the privilege of that information and they received a raft of reports, probably about two feet high. They then set in place at the regional level, both here at the South East and at the South West, a procedure for looking at the priorities for training. They have actually gone back to those businesses that have put up their hands for training to look at what training can be delivered to suit their needs. That is happening. Not only that; they are also feeding information through to the higher levels. It is available through your local TAFE but it is also available through your state people. So we have got the information, we have provided the information and we continue to use that in any way we can for lobbying.

**Mr ADAMS**—I commend you on your trail and on your seasonal jobs calendar as well.

**Mr McAloon**—Madam Chair, could I just comment on the VET program? Last year we were looking at the VET program very closely. We went over to Launceston and we thought that was probably one of the best VET programs that we had seen. We learnt a lot from that.

**CHAIR**—I am sure Mr Adams will be happy to hear that. Mrs Pollock. Can I just ask you about the \$1.5 million worth of labour brought in for the harvest industry?

**Mrs Pollock**—That was actually for the blue gums. It was brought in by a Western Australian firm.

**CHAIR**—How long was that labour required?

**Mrs Pollock**—For a two-month period.

**CHAIR**—If there had been the accommodation for them, could there have been any jobs found for them beyond that two-month period? Or was that a definite seasonal in and out?

**Mrs Pollock**—For that particular time, this company chose to go that way. We are finding here that a lot of the shearers are taking up that opportunity. When it is quiet for the shearers they will go and do the blue gum planting.

**CHAIR**—So you are continuing to plant the blue gums and this is becoming almost a permanent seasonal position?

**Mrs Pollock**—No, it is only for a two-month period.

**CHAIR**—But does it come up every year? Are you planting more each year?

**Mrs Pollock**—It does but, like I said, it is an investment. The investors are creating the opportunity. It is not being market driven.

**Mr McAloon**—It is contingent on the investors.

**CHAIR**—I am aware of that. Everywhere I go in Australia I see far more places where they are growing blue gums. I think it is a race to see if we can plant more vines or more blue gums at the moment.

**Senator McKIERNAN**—Is there any reason for the Blue Lake? We keep hearing about the Blue Lake. Do you get any water from the Blue Lake for the blue gums?

**Mr RIPOLL**—It's a quarry, isn't it?

**Mrs Pollock**—That is our local water supply.

**CHAIR**—Would you ignore the ignorance of my colleagues from other states who, when I pointed out the Blue Lake with some awe – I have always been in awe of it – the senator on my left said, 'But isn't it just another quarry?' As we are now about to complete these hearings today, I would urge you to take him aside and inform him about the Blue Lake and assure him that it is not just a quarry but one of the wonders not only of the south-east but also of South Australia. I do believe that both of my colleagues are in need of some education about the Blue Lake.

I would like to thank you very much for appearing before us today. We do appreciate the time that you have spent here. We hope that something will come out of this inquiry that will be of benefit to you.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Ripoll)

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 3.05 p.m.**