



Submission No. .... 54a .....
Date Received .....

OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

18 June 2007

J.  
**RECEIVED**  
19 JUN 2007  
BY: mig

Dr Kate Sullivan  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
Department of House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Dr Sullivan,

Engineers Australia is the peak body for engineering practitioners in Australia and represents all disciplines and branches of engineering. Engineers Australia has around 80,000 members Australia wide and is the largest and most diverse engineering association in Australia. All members of Engineers Australia are bound by a common commitment to promote engineering and facilitate its practice for the common good.

On behalf of Engineers Australia I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear with our colleague from APESMA before the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry hearing into Temporary Business (Long Stay) 457 Visas on Friday 1 May 2007.

During the Committee hearing Engineers Australia was asked to provide further information on our migration assessment process.

In the 2006 report by the Committee "*Negotiating the Maze: review of arrangements for overseas skills recognition, upgrading and licensing*" Engineers Australia's migration assessment process was praised as "a very good system of qualifications assessment and other agencies would do well to implement similar systems".

Currently Engineers Australia undertakes well over 4000 skills assessments each year for engineers considering migration to Australia under the permanent migration scheme. The average processing time for each application is three to five weeks. Applicants who have university qualifications recognised by the Washington Accord [www.washingtonaccord.org](http://www.washingtonaccord.org) often experience faster processing times.

Engineers Australia is a not-for-profit professional association, however fees are charged to cover the costs of processing applications. The service provided to the Australian government by entities like Engineers Australia in undertaking skills assessments should not be undervalued. The process provides an independent check that skilled migrants entering Australia have equivalent qualifications to Australian engineers. This is particularly important for a profession like engineering where public health and safety may be at risk if the skills of migrant engineers do not meet Australian standards.

I would also like to take this opportunity to outline two additional points of concern regarding the 457 Visa system. The first is that the value of educating and developing the skills of Australians may be overlooked by a preference to taking on large numbers of skilled migrants to overcome skill shortages. In a cost conscious commercial environment, there is a danger that employers will be tempted to make greater use of "off the shelf" skills available overseas. This is especially true where there may be delayed access to such skills through local training.

One of the key industries accessing engineering skills through the 457 visa stream is the Mining and Resources Sector. While skill shortages exacerbate and migration numbers go up to meet demand in this sector, only 250 Mining and Minerals engineers graduate from Australian university's each year. In Western Australia only 798 engineers graduate in all engineering disciplines annually, while only two engineers graduate in the Northern Territory.

Due to the stagnated number of Australian students graduating from engineering courses, maintaining the levels of the skilled migration program has become crucially important to Australian industry. Simply from a risk management approach, this vulnerability needs to be addressed. Engineers Australia is concerned that if local training does not increase and the competition to attract skilled migrants continues to heat up, Australia may not be able to attract enough migrants to meet industries skills needs.

Until recently only traditional immigrant countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States competed for immigrants. Now European and Asian nations in particular are entering the competition. This focus on skilled migration will only increase as more countries experience labour shortages and population pressures. Given the increasing risk that Australia's skilled migrant intake may not be sustainable, enhancing and expanding Australia's skills base through investment in education and training is a preferred course of action which is guaranteed to achieve longer-term benefits for Australia.

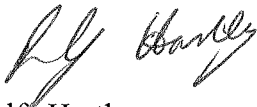
Secondly, Engineers Australia is concerned that the 457 visa system may be assuming that the skills and experience of migrant engineers are being assessed through a licensing or registration system. As we have outlined in section 4.2 of the submission, engineers who enter Australia on a 457 visa, unlike many other professionals including Architects, Doctors and Lawyers, are not having their qualifications assessed by a registration or licensing scheme.

Other than in Queensland, skills assessment through registration is voluntary. As a result many of the "engineers" entering via the 457 visa system may not actually be competent to offer their services to the Australian public. At present we have no way of determining the skill level of engineers migrating temporarily to Australia. Engineers Australia is hopeful that the employers who are employing these individuals are certain of their abilities.

Given the potential risk to public health and safety associated with delivering some types of engineering work, Engineers Australia believes that given the absence of a licensing and registration system for engineers, thought must be given as to whether individuals who enter Australia under the 457 visa scheme should have to successfully undergo a skills assessment to confirm the level of their engineering expertise.

Thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rolfe Hartley', written in a cursive style.

Rolfe Hartley  
FIEAust CPEng FEIANZ FIPENZ  
National President