

16 August 2002

The Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find enclosed our input in regards to the Review of Australia's skilled labour migration and temporary entry programme.

We believe our input relates to the following particular terms of reference for the review:

- The degree to which quality permanent skilled migrants are being attracted to Australia and settling well
- Whether there are policy and/or procedural mechanisms that might be developed to improve competitiveness
- Settlement patterns for new arrivals including the roles played by State and local authorities

We look forward to hearing from you the results of the review.

Sincerely yours

Elaine Martin  
President

## Context of the Submission

The Mackay Region consists of seven Local Government Areas with a total land size of 69,175 square kilometres and an estimated resident population of 127,531. ([http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/data/publications/reg\\_pro/macka\\_0601//mack.htm](http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/data/publications/reg_pro/macka_0601//mack.htm)) The region offers many opportunities to skilled people from overseas countries. Some of the major industries in the Mackay region include agricultural and mineral production, overseas commodity exports through several ports, and tourism.

The Mackay Regional Council for Social Development (MRCSD) is a community-based organisation with a regional focus. It manages the Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS) for the Mackay area, providing information, referral, support, and advocacy to newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants, who choose to settle in the region.

CSSS is the only identifiable service in the Mackay region with a specific interest in the needs of migrants or overseas-born people, regardless of their immigration status. Many citizens in the region regard the service as "DIMIA". Consequently, CSSS receives a wide variety of requests and provides services that are outside the range of its settlement work program.

Some of these additional services include the following:

- **Referrals in relation to immigration information.** DIMIA's only office locations are in Brisbane and Cairns. This makes it very difficult for both migrants and non-migrants to access DIMIA services especially for people who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with telephone or internet services.
- **Responses to referrals from the Call Centre.** DIMIA's Call Centre "menu" includes Mackay as a location for assistance, resulting in the program receiving requests for assistance with general immigration issues that are outside the scope of "settlement" difficulties.
- **Business/Skill migration issues.** In particular, employers in the Mackay region, and occasionally outside Mackay, who wish to sponsor employees from overseas, contact CSSS in Mackay. The CSSS worker provides assistance through the provision of the direct contact number for the DIMIA Business Unit.
- **Lack of Registered Immigration Agent in Mackay.** CSSS is often approached by people in regard to sponsorship, whether it is a family, business or skill migration issue. Requests include the processes for accessing information on visas or applying for passports. There is no other service within the Mackay region to which these enquiries can be referred. MRCSD is looking for funding to provide such a service.
- **Mainstream providers (business people, school, church and other service providers) utilise CSSS to access DIMIA services.** Examples include information on citizenship info, sponsoring and others.
- **CSSS provides not only direct or one to service to migrants but also facilitates processes to address identified settlement issues by involving workers from mainstream services in any initiatives instigated by the CSSS worker.** Examples

include the formation of task groups involving "grass-roots" migrants and mainstream workers to implement strategies developed from the recent CSSS forum.

Some of these "extra" services (outlined above) impact on other DIMIA programs, such as Australia's Migration and Temporary Entry Program, in ways relative to the following objectives within the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee:

- The degree to which quality permanent skilled migrants are being attracted to Australia and settling well.
- Whether there are policy and/or procedural mechanisms that might be developed to improve competitiveness.
- Settlement patterns for new arrivals including the role played by State and local authorities.

#### **Other Comments Relevant to the Review**

1. There is an overall lack of incentives to entice skilled people from overseas to settle in regional areas of Australia. The opportunities and resources available in regional Australia are fewer than those available in metropolitan centres. Services such as medical and dental care, educational and employment assistance, public transport, and recreation and leisure pursuits are more abundant, accessible, and affordable in larger cities.

To compound this, there is also a lack of support infrastructure to assist in the retention of skilled migrants, particularly in relation to those in the Skilled – Independent and Skilled – Australian sponsored categories.

Regional Australia cannot attract and/or retain skilled people without broad assistance and support.

One example of the outcome of this lack of support follows:

A family settles in the Mackay region on a temporary visa. The husband and father is a teacher and is the primary applicant for migration. He gained employment, and then suffered considerable illness, which incurred extensive medical costs. The family is now considering returning to its country of origin because it cannot afford the ongoing medical expenses involved in managing the man's illness.

2. There appears to be, currently, no mechanism in place to monitor the settlement progress of skilled overseas people into regional areas. This means that any review of the Program, such as that occurring now, could be hazy and imprecise.

For example: An engineer is the primary applicant for Skilled – Independent migration. He has been unable to find employment and now suffers from depression. Ironically, his wife has obtained employment in her own profession – General Practice.

Particularly for those in the Skilled – Independent and Skilled – Australian sponsored categories, a procedural mechanism needs to be established to enable accurate evaluation of their settlement progress and to allow DIMIA to determine whether further support may be needed by an individual or family.

A family in the Skilled – Independent category gives an example of the difficulties faced by some migrants. After moving to the Mackay region from Brisbane, a period of almost two

years elapsed before the husband found employment in the mining industry. The family was not entitled to any income assistance during that period and relied on its own financial resources to survive. When those resources began to dwindle, the feelings of frustration and desperation experienced by the family became increasingly concerning.

For further information on any of the points raised in this brief, please contact:

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