

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF SKILLED MIGRATION BY THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Population Strategy and Policy

The Victorian Government is committed to growing the population of Victoria – including regional Victoria. To this end it has a number of targets:

- to increase the State's population to 6 million by 2025
- to seek a better distribution of growth so it is shared between Melbourne, regional centres and rural areas by
 - increasing the annual rate of population growth in country Victoria to 1.25 percent per annum by 2006
 - achieving a population in regional Victoria of 1.75 million by 2025, an increase of around 400,000
 - increasing Victoria's share of Australia's skilled migrants to at least its share of Australia's population (25%).

Current projections indicate that migration will play an increasingly important role in growing the Victorian population. This is a direct result of the fact that natural increase as a source of growth will decline over the next 10-20 years. As a result, the relative size of the working age population will decline. Migration is therefore a key lever for the Government to mitigate the consequent impact on economic growth.

The Victorian Government considers that a National Population Policy is the most effective way to understand and plan for population change in a strategic, integrated and balanced manner.

It is for this reason that the Victorian Government has led the national debate on this issue, and on 25 February 2002 supported a Population Summit to generate discussion on the wide range of variables that need to be integrated as part of a national policy. The outcome of this Summit was a communiqué signed by all State and Territory leaders recommending the development of a National Population Policy.

Increasing Skilled Migration to Victoria

The Victorian Government has committed \$6 million over 4 years to implement strategies that will increase the number of skilled and business migrants settling in Victoria, and in particular, regional Victoria.

Since 1999/00 the Victorian Government has implemented strategies to increase Victoria's share of Australia's skilled migrants to at least its share of

Australia's population (25%). At 2002/03 the state's intake of skilled migrant had increased to 24%, up from 18% in 1998/99.

Over the next 4 years, the Victorian Government will continue to implement strategies to ensure Victoria receives at least a 25% share of Australia's skilled migrants:

- enhance targeted *marketing and matching* of migrants to opportunities, including to international students;
- increase use of *State specific migration programs*;
- improve *partnerships* with, and *leveraging* off, relevant Victorian Government and other agencies' programs; and
- enhance *labour market orientation and integration* of skilled migrants.

Increasing Skilled Migration to Regional Victoria

While Regional Victoria has about 27% of Victoria's population it receives less than 5% of Victoria's skilled migrants. Over the past 2 years Victoria has actively promoted migration in regional Victoria and formed partnerships with local government, economic development, and other regionally based agencies to refer migrants to regional areas where their skills are needed.

These partnerships have identified considerable leadership at the local government level to attract new migrants – skilled and unskilled – to regional communities, and to prepare local communities to receive and settle new migrants. Communities throughout regional Victoria are actively working towards, or have expressed interest in, attracting more migrants to benefit their region e.g. Warrnambool, Gippsland, Swan Hill, Albury/Wodonga.

Over the next 4 years, Victoria will implement a range of strategies to increase dispersal of skilled migrants to regional Victoria:

- enhance *marketing and matching* of migrants to opportunities, including to international students;
- build regional *stakeholder engagement*; and
- enhance *community engagement and development* (which includes identifying settlement resources, and providing settlement support)

Commonwealth, State and Local Governments together with regional stakeholders have a role to play in coordinating, developing and promoting local opportunities and resources to attract migrants to regional areas of Australia.

For Victoria, we have looked abroad for effective approaches and regional migration strategies being used in other countries. Some of the results from the strategies adopted in the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Manitoba are proving to be successful.

Quebec, in particular, has seen positive results from its three-year regional migration strategy (2001-2003), where the number of migrants settling outside

the Greater Montreal area has increased significantly over that period. Both Quebec and Manitoba have focused on developing settlement and labour market orientation programs to attract migrants to regional areas, and to re-direct recently arrived migrants from major cities to regional areas where job opportunities are identified.

The 2003/04 – 2006/07 Regional Migration Action Plan for Victoria will use some of these concepts together with existing approaches in order to meet our regional migration targets.

Improved Labour Market Orientation and Integration of Migrants

On their own, immigration policies are insufficient to ensure that Australia benefits from the highly sought after qualifications, skills and experience that overseas qualified migrants bring to the Australian work force.

The Victorian Government believes that the Commonwealth needs to examine the effectiveness of its employment and settlement services in ensuring quick integration of migrants into the Australian labour market using their skills and experience; and the role its employment and settlement services could play in attracting and retaining skilled migrants to regional areas of Australia where their skills are needed.

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of building a smooth pathway between migration and employment to encourage skilled migrants to remain in their chosen location. It funds a range of programs and services to provide labour market orientation, qualification assessment and work experience for recently arrived overseas-qualified professionals, whether entering through skilled, family or humanitarian streams. The programs aim to ensure that as many skilled migrants as possible secure employment using their qualifications and experience.

Despite having their qualifications recognised at the skills assessment stage of visa processing, many skilled migrants face difficulties in obtaining employment using their overseas qualifications and experience. Highly skilled and qualified migrants entering through refugee, humanitarian and family streams, where no pre-migration skills assessment is undertaken, face greater difficulty. Barriers include:

- difficulties in negotiating at times complex pathways through Commonwealth and State qualification recognition, professional registration and employment services
- employer reluctance to accept overseas qualifications, and overseas qualified and experienced professionals without local work experience
- lack of awareness by job seekers about how to market themselves into jobs
- cost of qualification recognition

Satisfactory skills assessments for migration purposes do not guarantee professional registration and employment due to different requirements of national and state assessment and registration authorities.

Improved coordination between Commonwealth Government employment services, Victorian Government labour market programs, national and state professional and registration bodies is required to assist overseas qualified professionals enter the workforce more quickly and reducing skills wastage.

Given the evidence of shortages of employees in regional areas of Australia from highly skilled (e.g. doctors and dentistry) to middle skilled (e.g. farm management and teachers) and semi skilled (e.g. horticulture and dairy workers) the Commonwealth should look at building partnerships between its immigration services and its employment/job placement services. The Commonwealth Government should look at the scope of its employment services, with its knowledge of local labour market needs, to encourage the attraction of migrants and Australian residents to regional areas where skills are needed.

Commonwealth/Victorian Working Party on Migration

On 29 August 2003 the Premier of Victoria met with the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The Premier reiterated this Government's commitment to growing the state's share of Australia's total migrant intake across all visa categories and to increasing the number of migrants who settle in regional Victoria where skills shortages are more acute.

The Premier and Minister agreed it would be beneficial to establish a Commonwealth/Victorian working party on migration to explore policy options to attract more migrants to Victoria, particularly regional Victoria.

The working party met for the first time on 23 October 2003 and will report its findings in early 2004. Participation in this working party is further evidence of the Victorian Government's commitment to attracting more migrants to the state.