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

Dear Dr Sullivan

**Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Inquiry into aspects of temporary business visas**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the inquiry.

This submission is made by the Board as a Gazetted Regional Certifying Body (RCB) for which I am the authorized person.

The Terms of Reference include inquiry into the effectiveness of monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements for Temporary Business (Long Stay) 457 Visas for which the Board is authorized to provide certification for Riverina regional employers. Monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements do not directly involve the Board as an RCB, but English language proficiency is a matter of interest.

Background

The Riverina Regional Development Board is one of 13 Boards in New South Wales that operate as Incorporated Associations with administration funding support from NSW Department of State and Regional Development. The Boards operate under the Minister for Regional Development and in conjunction with the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, as advisory bodies to the Government on regional development issues and initiatives and as vehicles for implementing actions to further regional development.

The NSW Government recognizes that the key driver of economic development in the regions is local leadership. It is in this capacity that the Board plays a critical role in advising the Government and leading local collaborative efforts to attract business investment that will deliver sustainable long-term employment and regional prosperity. In this context, the Board works with 16 local government councils that fall within its geographic jurisdiction across 76,000 square kilometres, with a population of around 163,000 people.



Riverina Regional Development Board

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Supported by NSW Department of State and Regional Development

The Board's activities are conducted within the framework of its Strategic Plan 2004-2010 and in accordance with annual business plans.

One of the Board's key strategy areas is Employment, Education and Training with the first strategy listed as the need to address skill shortages.

It is in the latter context that the Board, in fulfilling its role as a Regional Certifying Body, has an opportunity to facilitate the entry of skilled migrants into the region.

The Board identified in 2005 the opportunities that would present to address acknowledged skill shortages in the region through the appointment of a project officer dedicated to addressing the requirements of the Board as an RCB in a more professional and holistic manner. The Board and its Executive Officer considered that, prior to the appointment of the Riverina Skilled Migration Project Officer (RSMPO) the Board was simply not resourced to provide such services in an appropriate manner.

The RSMPO proved to be a valuable appointment and the Board was fortunate to obtain the services of a very competent young woman who quickly elevated the status of the Board as an RCB from her commencement in the role in February 2005.. Unfortunately, the lack of a continuous stream of funding led to the resignation of the Officer in September 2006.

During her tenure, the Officer processed 101 applications for the various skilled migration programs, in particular, 33 certifications were provided for Temporary Business (Long Stay) 457 applications. A reference is made later in this submission to the imminent release of survey findings that indicate a strong level of employment success for skilled migration visa recipients in the Riverina.

The 457 Visa, therefore, is a valuable tool in addressing skill shortages in this region.

Throughout the period, the Board has been very active at most Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs seminars, conferences and briefings. Board Executive Officer Peter Dale served on the Commonwealth/NSW Working Party on Migration to Sydney and Regional NSW and currently serves on the Monitoring Group. Of interest, the release of a survey on Skilled Migration to the Riverina conducted by DIMA is expected to be available in February 2007, with the draft indicating a relatively high level of success in the placement of skilled migrants into skilled positions in the Riverina to the satisfaction of both employers and migrants.

This survey report can be made available to the Committee on finalisation.

English language proficiency

Currently, the 457 visa does not stipulate any obligatory level for English proficiency and there appears to be good argument to leave it unchanged, allowing recruitment protocols and market factors in human resource management to determine the necessary English levels for various job tasks.

For instance, as the Riverina is an acknowledged food bowl for Australia, with strong export activity in the food and beverage sector, it follows that a range of industry skills are required in the agricultural, horticultural, viticultural and citrus sectors.

It is known that major producers in the Griffith area are frequently seeking on-farm Managers or Supervisors and other specialists to provide an intermediary role between the boss and a workforce heavily populated with many nationalities. In these circumstances, a basic proficiency is sufficient, around the IELTS 4.5 equivalent or even less. Obviously, a business proprietor would not wish to employ any skilled person that could not effectively communicate with him or her in English. The same scenario exists for employment of specialist chefs, in the Asian restaurants in particular, where exemptions are often sought for application of English language requirements. In these circumstances, there is no public interface as the chef is in the kitchen taking instructions in an Asian language, or from a menu with printed Asian characters and preparing meals accordingly.

However, it is acknowledged that a higher level of English language proficiency is likely to be required in other sectors such as production, finance and banking etc.

For the purposes of this enquiry, then, the Board's experience would lead it to the view that it would be valuable to maintain a flexible approach to English language requirements for the Temporary Business (Long Stay) Visa category.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Peter Dale', written in black ink.

Peter Dale
Executive Officer