

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 11 May, 2011

Resource employers say skilled migrants valued, not second-class

Resource industry employers are urging the Federal Labor Government to stand firm in the face of demands from both The Greens and the union movement opposed to increasing the level of skilled migration announced in the Federal Budget last night.

Steve Knott, Chief Executive of resource industry employer group AMMA, said the Government's announcement on Enterprise Migration Agreements (EMAs) put in place specifically for the sector are a huge step in the right direction, and reflect a recognition Australia faces an unprecedented skills shortage.

"Resource employers have to fill the huge void in the pool of available workers in order to progress projects which are vital to the economic interests of all Australians," Mr Knott said.

"It is disappointing to hear from people who traditionally claimed to be the champions of advocating the rights of migrants now turning around and attempting to portray hard-working migrants who want to come to Australia to work for a short period before returning home as 'queue jumpers'.

"Skilled workers coming to our nation to participate in our workforces and assist us in building the projects vital to our economic future should be welcomed, not demonised as some form of second-class citizen.

"The changes to the EMAs will see workers brought in to work on projects for a defined period, and in addition employers are obligated to train local staff," Mr Knott said.

Mr Knott said last night's Budget announcement reflected the fact that despite pulling all the right policy levers on the domestic labour market - encouraging increased workforce participation and encouraging skills training - Australia's labour force simply cannot meet the levels of demand in the not-to-distant future.

"Despite the best efforts of both industry and government to train more workers, the stark reality is that we need overseas workers to fill the gaps and progress our resource projects.

"Resource industry employers are already dedicating millions of dollars to the processes of recruiting, retraining and retaining Australian workers in the industry. Those critics who wish to now turn around and claim skilled migrants are putting Australians out of a job don't understand that resource employers aren't able to find enough skilled workers.

"Even with the migration reforms announced by the Gillard Government in last night's Budget there remains a very real risk of there being a shortfall of skilled workers available to some industry sectors," Mr Knott said.

ENDS

Note: Employer access to the Enterprise Migration System is conditional on projects meeting a threshold of \$2 billion in capital expenditure and engaging a peak workforce of 1500 workers. It is estimated this will capture approximately 32 major projects based on current resource figures. Resource projects not captured under Enterprise Migration Agreements will still have access to a fast track visa processing scheme where applications will be processed within five working days.

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